Hafa Adai!

'CUC will be working with EPA to resolve penalty.' PAGE 2
236 surgeries done in successful SHS spay/neuter clinic. PAGE 3

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Saipan Tribune

THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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US Census: 89.6% of kids in NMI have computer, internet

Travilla's testimony postponed again

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

In this screengrab from a YouTube video, Robert Travilla, right, confers with his lawyer, Joseph Horrey, as they appear Tuesday before the House of Representatives Special Committee on Federal Assistance & Disaster-related Funding that is investigating the previous administration's Building Optimism, Opportunity, and Stability Together grant program. Travilla's scheduled testimony did not push through yesterday after he asked for an extension.

» Yumul says they will not entertain another extension request

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The scheduled testimony of Robert Travilla, one of the contractors hired to promote the previous administration's Building Optimism, Opportunity, and Stability

See TRAVILLA on Page 4

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

In this screengrab from a YouTube video, Del Benson speaks during the public comments portion of the House Special Committee on Federal Assistance & Disaster-related Funding hearing into the BOOST Program on Tuesday.

Benson hopes House probe into BOOST Program does not become a witch hunt

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Long-time Saipan resident Del Benson hopes the ongoing investigation on the previous administration's

See BENSON on Page 4

Senate OKs resolutions to establish PPP, encourage web-based digital economy

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Senate adopted on Tuesday a resolution to request Gov. Arnold I. Palacios to seek the assistance of the federal government to establish a Paycheck Protection Program to help businesses keep their workforce employed during the post-COVID-19 pandemic

See SENATE on Page 4

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Senate President Edith E. DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan) presides over a Senate session Tuesday afternoon. One of the Senate actions taken that day was passing two Senate resolutions introduced by DeLeon Guerrero.

» Among workers, 62.6% were born outside of the CNMI

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

In the CNMI, 89.6% of children ages 5 to 17 live in households with a computer and broadband internet, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 Island Areas Censuses Detailed Cross-Tabulation Data for the CNMI released last week.

See CENSUS on Page 4

Tribal bloodshed shines spotlight on instability in PNG's highlands

By ROD McGUIRK
Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)—A tribal clash in Papua New Guinea's remote highlands in which at least 26 people were killed has put a growing internal security problem under the microscope in the strategically vital South Pacific island nation that has garnered closer military attention from the United States and China.

See TRIBAL on Page 4

INSIDE

BUSINESS
Fashion Week is virtually every day at Virtue Tailor Shop in San Antonio as its owners are expert seamsters from Saipan's old garment industry.
PAGE 11

NATION
Election officials face a long list of challenges this year, including potential cyberattacks waged by foreign governments, criminal ransomware gangs attacking computer systems and the persistence of election misinformation.
PAGE 12

LIFE & STYLE
Rare-book dealer Glenn Horowitz, former Rock & Roll Hall of Fame curator Craig Inciardi and memorabilia seller Edward Kosinski are charged with conspiring to own and try to sell manuscripts of "Hotel California" and other Eagles hits without the right to do so.
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Local

‘CUC will be working with EPA to resolve penalty’

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Acting Commonwealth Utilities Corp. executive director Betty G. Terlaje said last Tuesday they will be working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the coming weeks to come to a “productive resolution” on the $162,000 penalty that EPA has imposed on CUC for failing to timely fill critical vacant positions.

Speaking during the public comments portion of a Senate session, Terlaje said they do not interpret this assessment of penalties as punishment, considering that EPA has always been in CUC’s corner.

She said the court-appointed orders that outlines the things that CUC must do (called “stipulated orders”)—including filling in critical positions—provide a venue for CUC to conduct informal dispute resolution and negotiate with EPA.

“It is clear to us that, rather than fining CUC for its understandable difficulties, it would be much more prudent to direct these funds toward attracting a qualified candidate to apply, whether by raising salary, or through other incentives,” Terlaje said.

Since 2008, CUC has been under two court-stipulated orders in which the EPA, through the U.S. Department of Justice, provides oversight for numerous aspects of CUC’s operations.

Terlaje said this is to make sure that CUC conducts itself in a manner that is environmentally responsible and is aligned with federal and Commonwealth laws.

Terlaje said EPA has been an incredible partner in this oversight, and has always proven to be a helpful ally by providing funding, technical guidance, and other assistance.

She said EPA has also been strict, but fair, in its assessment of CUC when it comes to compliance with the stipulated orders.

Terlaje noted that one of the stipulated orders is that CUC’s management must be filled with competent people who

See CUC on Page 4

236 surgeries done in successful SHS spay/neuter clinic

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Saipan Humane Society's February Spay and Neuter Clinic from Feb. 5 to 15 at the Koblerville Community Center was "overwhelmingly successful," with a total of 236 surgeries done in just 10 days, said SHS clinic manager Ruby Ma.

Thanks to the collaborative efforts of SHS staff/volunteers, visiting veterinarians, and the Saipan Dog Control Program staff, 36 cats and 106 dogs were spayed, and 29 cats and 65 dogs were neutered. Spaying is the sterilization of female pets; neutering is for male pets.

According to the SHS team, "this tremendous effort is projected to prevent a staggering 7,303,000 unwanted puppies over the next six years."

In addition to the spay/neuter surgeries, the clinic performed six special surgeries—including three amputations, one eye removal, and two lump removals. The team also conducted 209 wellness visits, administered 88 dewormers, 102 flea/tick treatments, and addressed 182 medical concerns.

SHS expresses their heartfelt appreciation to everyone who contributed to this achievement, with immense gratitude to visiting veterinarian Dr. Jessica Nelson and licensed veterinary technician Lauren Ruiz from the Banfield organization.

A significant aspect of the clinic was the financial sponsorship provided to support eight shelter dogs, 44 owned pets (including 29 dogs, five puppies, and 10 cats). SHS also expresses its deep gratitude to animal advocate Boonie Babies for their efforts in promoting the GoFundMe spay and neuter campaign and facilitating community involvement in controlling animal overpopulation.

The organization also thanked the Saipan Mayor's Office and its Animal Shelter/Dog Control Program for their invaluable support throughout the preparation, surgery, and logistics phases of the clinic.

SHS also thanks the Office of Youth Affairs for the use of the Koblerville Community Center and accommodating their clinic hours, greatly enhancing accessibility for the community.

"The success of the clinic was further bolstered by the generous contributions of various sponsors. Thanks to Spicy Thai, Original Lucky Bill, The Shack, American Pizza and Grill, Godfather's Bar, and Great Harvest for feeding our hardworking team, sustaining energy levels during the busy clinic days," said SHS.

"Special appreciation goes to [Atkins Kroll Saipan] for sponsoring the vehicle for Dr. Sam Warner during her volunteer work in the second week of the spay and neuter clinic. Additionally, Pacific Eco, the laundry sponsor, ensured that all surgical and recovery clothing was impeccably clean," added SHS.

"We express sincere gratitude to all volunteers who played a pivotal role in making the clinic run smoothly, aiding in the recovery of animal's post-surgery, and capturing the memorable moments through photographs and videos," said Ma.

As for the future, SHS is excited to announce plans to move to a larger facility this year. It is still in the works, so stay tuned for more details. This expansion aims to increase service capacity and business hours, allowing the organization to better serve the community's needs.

For more information about SHS and its initiatives, visit www.saipanhumanesociety.org/.

QUINN BREADY
Visiting veterinarian Dr. Jessica Nelson does surgery on a pet during the Saipan Humane Society's February Spay and Neuter Clinic held from Feb. 5 to 15 at the Koblerville Community Center.

QUINN BREADY
Saipan Mayor's Office Animal Shelter staff Stephanie Camacho and a coworker works on a pet during the Saipan Humane Society's February Spay and Neuter Clinic held from Feb. 5 to 15 at the Koblerville Community Center.

QUINN BREADY
Saipan Humane Society clinic manager Ruby Ma cares for someone's cat during the SHS February Spay and Neuter Clinic held from Feb. 5 to 15 at the Koblerville Community Center.

QUINN BREADY
Visiting veterinarians, Saipan Humane Society staff/volunteers, and Saipan Dog Control Program staff hard at work during the SHS February Spay and Neuter Clinic held from Feb. 5 to 15 at the Koblerville Community Center.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM, OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
Tel: (670) 664-2371 | Fax: (670) 664-2408 | Caller Box 10007, Saipan, MP 96950

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

RFP24-GOV-CIP-42400042: PROVISION OF ARCHITECT/ENGINEERING SERVICES FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR 702 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

SUBMISSION DATE: 10:00 AM ChST MARCH 8, 2024

Governor Arnold I. Palacios and Lt. Governor David M. Apatang, through the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), are soliciting sealed proposals for the *Provision of Environmental Consultant Services for Capital Improvement Projects* funded through the 702 Covenant funding by the Office of Insular Affairs, US Department of Interior.

The project package will be available in digital format only beginning **February 8, 2024** at the Capital Improvement Program Office, Office of the Governor, Juan A. Sablan Administration Building in Capitol Hill, Saipan, during regular working hours or online at Vendor Self Service (selfservice.dof.gov.mp/vss/Vendors/VBids). Proposals must precisely follow the submittal requirements identified in the Scope of Work.

A Pre-Proposal Meeting will be held via Zoom Meetings at **10:00 AM on February 28, 2024.** Questions regarding this RFP may be sumitted via email to Ms. Nerissa B. Karakaya at nerissa.benavente@gov.mp no later than **4:00 PM ChST March 1, 2024.** All Questions and answers will be shared with all prospective proposers.

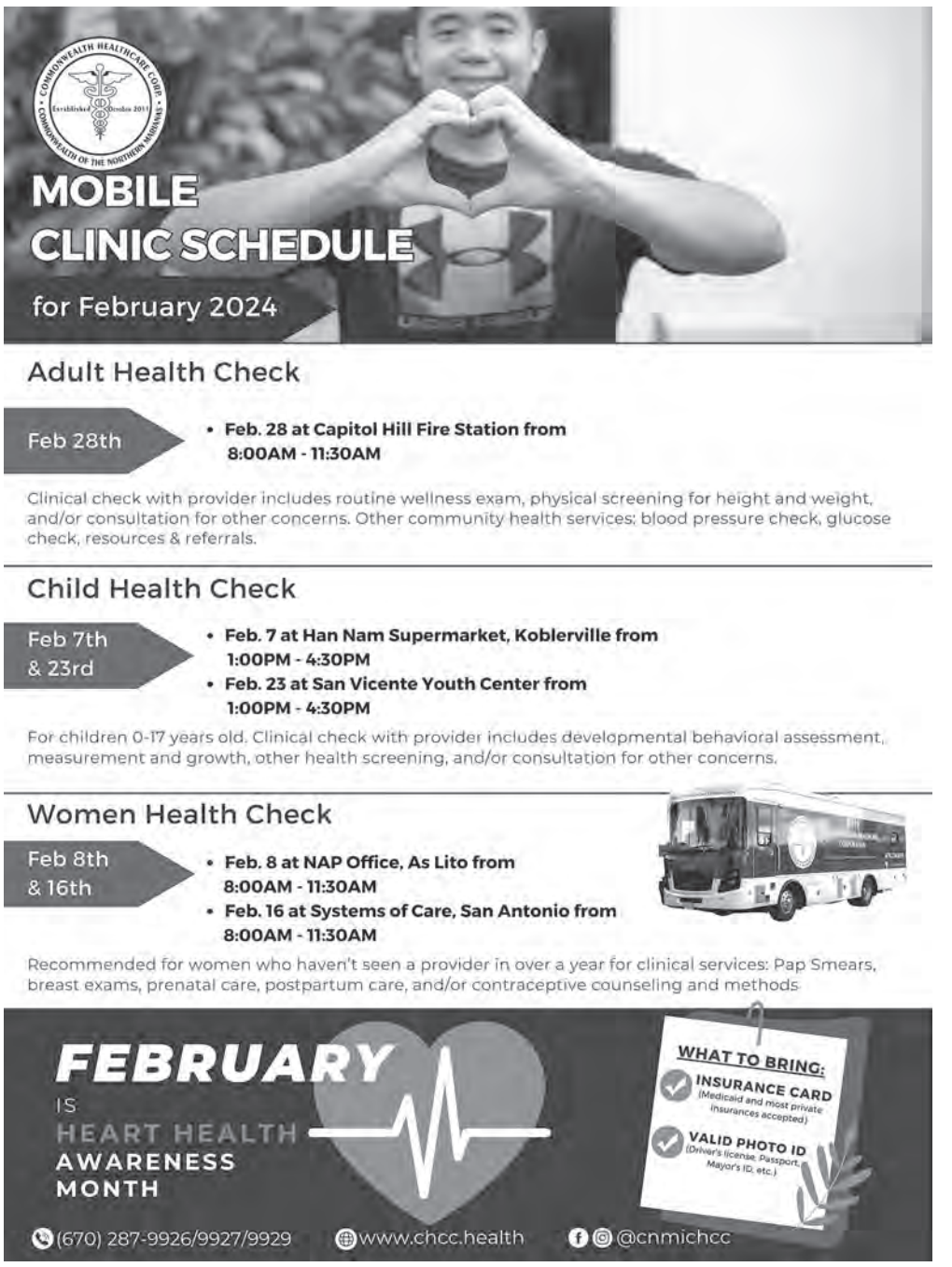
Proposers located outside of the CNMI must fill out and submit the Notice of Intent Form to the Acting Director of Procurement Services no later than **10:00 AM ChST. March 8, 2024.**

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria: (1) Qualifications of personnel or sub-consultants – 40%; (2) Past Experience and Performance as a Project Manager – 40%; and (3) Project Methodology – 20%.

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS, AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

/S/ Arnold I. Palacios
Governor, CNMI

/S/ Brien S. Nicholas Jr., Acting Director
CNMI Procurement Services


COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORP.
COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANAS
MOBILE
CLINIC SCHEDULE
for February 2024
Adult Health Check
Feb 28th
• Feb. 28 at Capitol Hill Fire Station from 8:00AM - 11:30AM
Clinical check with provider includes routine wellness exam, physical screening for height and weight, and/or consultation for other concerns. Other community health services: blood pressure check, glucose check, resources & referrals.
Child Health Check
Feb 7th & 23rd
• Feb. 7 at Han Nam Supermarket, Koblerville from 1:00PM - 4:30PM
• Feb. 23 at San Vicente Youth Center from 1:00PM - 4:30PM
For children 0-17 years old. Clinical check with provider includes developmental behavioral assessment, measurement and growth, other health screening, and/or consultation for other concerns.
Women Health Check
Feb 8th & 16th
• Feb. 8 at NAP Office, As Lito from 8:00AM - 11:30AM
• Feb. 16 at Systems of Care, San Antonio from 8:00AM - 11:30AM
Recommended for women who haven't seen a provider in over a year for clinical services: Pap Smears, breast exams, prenatal care, postpartum care, and/or contraceptive counseling and methods
FEBRUARY
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HEART HEALTH
AWARENESS
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WHAT TO BRING:
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VALID PHOTO ID
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TRIBAL

From page 1

The rival powers are increasingly keen to strike security pacts with the developing nation whose international significance has grown in tandem with China's increased regional influence.

Here's a look at some key issues surrounding Papua New Guinea's internal security concerns:

PAPUA NEW GUINEA, THE COUNTRY

Papua New Guinea is the most populous South Pacific island nation after Australia and was a colony of that near neighbor until independence in 1975.

The government estimates Papua New Guinea's population at around 10 million people, although a United Nations study, based on data including satellite photographs of roof tops, estimated in 2022 it could be as high as 17 million. An accurate census has not been held in the nation in decades.

It's a diverse country rich in resources including gold, nickel and natural gas with more than 800 Indigenous languages. Most of the population scrapes by as subsistence farmers.

WHY IS THERE TRIBAL WARFARE?

Civil unrest in the capital Port Moresby and Lae, the nation's second most populous city, made headlines last month when at least 15 people were reportedly killed during rioting and looting in street protests over a public service pay dispute.

But tribal warfare has a long history across the country and is becoming more lethal with an influx of illegal modern firearms in the highlands and increasing use of mercenary sharpshooters.

Some villagers accuse security forces of taking bribes from tribal warlords to help defeat rivals who don't pay for protection.

The latest tribal battle occurred in gold-rich Enga province. Another hotspot for tribal violence is Hela province. Both are among resource-rich western areas of the country where tribal conflict has escalated in recent decades, said Paul Barker, executive director of the Port Moresby-based policy think tank Institute of National Affairs.

Natural resources create jealousies and conflicts around how the wealth should be distributed, who was entitled to mining royalties and which landowners deserved compensation.

Other traditional triggers for tribal conflict include accusations of sorcery following sudden deaths such as car wrecks and payback for casualties from previous tribal wars.

WHY IS THE WORLD CONCERNED ABOUT PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S DOMESTIC SECURITY TURMOIL?

Joe Biden was to become the only sitting U.S. president to ever visit Papua New Guinea in May last year but cancelled at short notice to focus on debt limit talks in Washington, D.C. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken took Biden's place and signed a new security pact that sparked Papuan student protests over concerns that it undermined the country's sovereignty.

Chinese President Xi Jinping had visited in 2018 when Port Moresby hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders' summit.

The United States and its influential ally in the region, Australia, have been rapidly building bridges with Papua New Guinea and its island neighbors in response to China signing a security pact with the Solomons Islands in 2022 that raised the prospects of a Chinese naval foothold being established in the South Pacific.

China later failed in an ambitious attempt to get 10 Pacific island nations including Papua New Guinea, the Solomons' nearest neighbor, to sign a sweeping deal covering everything from security to fisheries.

CENSUS

From page 1

Pertaining to housing characteristics in 2020, U.S. Census also found, among other data, that households with a computer and internet had a higher median income ($36,142) than those without a computer ($15,950).

On economic characteristics, U.S. Census finds, among other data, that among workers age 16 and over, 62.6% were born outside of the CNMI while 37.4% were born in the CNMI.

The release, which is the final data set from the 2020 census, includes 95 demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics tables.

Also on housing characteristics, Census finds that 78.1% of all housing units were occupied; of those, 29% were occupied by owners and 71% by renters.

In owner-occupied households with only one person, comparing across age groups, householders ages 15 to 24 made up the smallest share (0.8%), while householders 65 years or older represented the largest share (30.7%).

The median monthly owner cost for households with a mortgage whose house was built in 2019 or 2020 was $900, and $159 for households that did not have a mortgage.

The median gross rent for households living in units built in 2019 or 2020 was $502.

Demographic characteristics showed that the median age in the CNMI was 34.4 years; males (52.6% of the population) and females (47.4%) had about the same median ages (34.5 and 34.3, respectively).

Almost half (46.6%) of the total population in the CNMI reported their race as Asian alone, while 43.7% reported their race as Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone.

The Asian alone population (median age 41.6) was much older than the wider CNMI population (median age 34.4), while the Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone population (median age 29.4) was younger.

As for social characteristics, over half (60.1%) of grandparents living with grandchildren under age 18 were female.

A higher percentage of younger co-resident grandparents were female; 70.4% of those ages 30 to 44 compared to 57.5% of those age 65 and over.

Among adults ages 25 to 29, women (28.4%) were more likely than men (22.3%) to be married.

This pattern was reversed among adults age 75 and over in households where 27.7% of women and 75.5% of men were currently married.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

TRAVILLA

From page 1

Together grant program, did not push through yesterday afternoon after he requested for an extension.

The House Special Committee on Federal Assistance & Disaster-related Funding that is investigating the BOOST Program granted the extension—as requested by Travilla and another contractor, Salina Sapp.

Rep. Ralph N. Yumul (Ind-Saipan), who chairs the committee, said Travilla and Sapp asked for the extension because they have a business meeting and an event in Guam.

The next committee hearing is March 5, 6, and 7, 2024, at 10am, to start with the testimony of the third contractor, Shayne Villanueva of Roil Soil.

Travilla, Sapp, and Villanueva were in charge of marketing the BOOST Program.

At the hearing yesterday afternoon, Yumul informed Joseph Horrey, who is the lawyer for both Travilla and Sapp, that the committee will no longer entertain another request for an extension.

The committee reset the dates for Travilla and Sapp to testify for March 7, 8, and possibly 11, 2024, at 10am.

Sapp was originally scheduled to testify on Feb. 27, 28, and 29, 2024.

Yumul said he received an email from Horrey Tuesday at 4:55pm requesting the extension.

Horey, who appeared at the hearing yesterday without his clients, thanked the committee for its consideration and recommended some dates for his clients to be available to testify. Yumul said the available dates are March 7, 8, and 11, 2024.

Horey said his clients will only be available after those dates, but Yumul said they cannot accept that because of upcoming budget hearings.

Yumul said the committee is giving Sapp and Travilla only March 7, 8, and 11 and the committee will have no issue issuing contempt citations if Travilla and Sapp don't show up. Yumul said they already gave Travilla and Sapp almost a month to prepare so there is no reason for another extension. Horrey said he will notify his clients about the dates.

Rep. Marissa Renee Flores (Ind-Saipan) commended a young man who spoke during the public comments portion of the hearing on Tuesday.

Referring to Michael Mahinay, who introduced himself as a private citizen during Tuesday's hearing, Flores said the young man reminded them of the reason why they're here and why this committee was established to begin with. "Obviously, he respects and loves the CNMI. This is his home. And he…would like to see these hearings with the witnesses come to some kind of conclusion," Flores said.

She said yesterday morning she had received many text messages from people throughout the CNMI sharing with her their sentiment, their excitement, and their interest in that day's (yesterday) hearing. But because the committee had received some documents at the last minute from several witnesses, they had no choice but to ask for new dates to better prepare themselves as they move forward with the hearings and to get to the bottom of the BOOST Program, Flores said.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

SENATE

From page 1

economic recession.

The Senate also adopted during the same session a resolution to encourage the public and private sectors to actively work to support the acquisition and retention of resident individuals and businesses participating in the internet-based digital economy.

The Senate adopted Senate Resolution No. 23-13 and Senate Resolution No. 23-14 without discussions. Senate President Edith E. DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan) is the author of both resolutions.

On Senate Resolution No. 23-13, DeLeon Guerrero earlier stated that they need to find ways to help businesses stay afloat while the lack of sufficient flights/tourists is being navigated.

The Senate president said the PPP saves jobs and businesses. She noted that many businesses are still struggling and are far from their pre-pandemic levels.

She stated in the resolution that one way to assist businesses and their employees during this difficult time is to request for federal assistance to establish a CNMI-only PPP for a certain period of time, similar to the Small Business Administration's PPP during the COVID-19 crisis.

With respect to Senate Resolution No. 23-14, DeLeon Guerrero earlier stated that the CNMI will reap significant benefit from attracting internet-based businesses and remote workers to become residents.

"Besides tourism, this is another business sector of an economy that we can attract into our market to generation additional revenue," the Senate president told *Saipan Tribune*.

She stated in the resolution that CNMI-based remote workers earn their income from sources outside the CNMI, yet these workers spend that income and pay taxes on that income in the Commonwealth.

BENSON

From page 1

Building Optimism, Opportunity, and Stability Together grant program does not become a witch hunt akin to the Salem witch trials.

"We seem to have followed U.S. politics into that form," Benson said Tuesday during the public comments portion of the hearing being done by the House Special Committee on Federal Assistance & Disaster-related Funding that is looking into the BOOST Program.

Benson, who has been a Saipan resident for over 30 years now, said the special committee needs to go after those who received the BOOST Program money that did not use the funding for its intended purpose. He said the special committee need to look at the facts, the issues, and address the issues that need to be addressed.

Absolutely, the committee needs to address corruption in the islands, Benson said.

"But that's a two-fold thing. It's not all one-sided. …Whoever is in power, they're the ones that are corrupt. …So let's be honest about this," he said.

Benson said he knows this is not the most politically correct thing to say, but that he wants to be honest with "how sometimes we close our eyes."

"Address the issues that need to be addressed. And let's really try and promote some transparency and honesty out of all of these," he said.

Michael Mahinay, a private citizen who also spoke during the public comments portion, said it is time to bring justice to the community as he and the people have witnessed the corruption that has been unfolding for too long.

Mahinay said the American Rescue Plan Act funds and the BOOST Program were meant to help the community thrive, but instead has become a political tool for personal gain.

"Instead of the people that would benefit from these funds, only a few would benefit from it," he said.

Mahinay said this BOOST hearing should continue and he hopes this committee will be able to retrieve the funds that have been lost.

CUC

From page 2

can do the work, and make sure that laws are complied with.

There are eight positions in which CUC is mandated to fill, two of them being the chief financial officer and executive director. Terlaje said CUC has admittedly struggled with filling those positions.

She said CUC has struggled with competition from the U.S. mainland, and a lack of local people either willing or qualified to do the work.

"It is difficult to convince people to move to the other side of the world when there are competitive salaries at home," Terlaje said.

She said EPA's admonition is standard of court filings. "While it sounds heavy-handed, there is no other way to describe our situation: because we lack these positions, we are simply not in compliance," Terlaje said.

Chamber presents 'Teamwork & Team Building' training

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce is thrilled to announce its 1st Quarter Professional Development Training, focused on "Teamwork & Team Building." This training session is scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 29, 2024, from 9am to 12pm. The event will take place at the Marianas Business Plaza, 6th Floor, Suite 604.

Facilitated by Jim Arenovski of Island Training Solutions, this training aims to equip participants with valuable insights and practical strategies to enhance teamwork within their organizations. The agenda includes:

■ Establishing a comprehensive orientation and onboarding process for new team members.

■ Articulating the mission and expectations under Company "Mission Possible" to guide team performance.

■ Engaging the team in an aspiration exercise to collectively define and aim for high-performance standards.

■ Ensuring team expectations are met through a commitment to clarity, consistency, attentive listening, and follow-through.

■ Implementing coaching strategies to support continuous improvement and development within the team.

■ Evaluating team composition to identify any missing elements contributing to building a truly great team.

■ Emphasizing effective communication strategies to maximize collaboration and understanding within the team.

The training promises a dynamic and interactive session, providing attendees with practical tools and strategies to foster a positive and productive team environment.

For more information or to secure your seat, contact the Saipan Chamber of Commerce at (670) 234-7150 or email contactus@saipan-chamber.org.

Don't miss this opportunity to elevate your team's performance and strengthen your organization's collaborative spirit. Register now to reserve your spot! ***(PR)***

Pilot sites for coconut rhinoceros beetle control

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea—The Papua New Guinea Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle task force team have agreed to set up pilot coconut palm demonstration sites to test out best control measures against the invasive Coconut Rhinoceros Beetles which have been aggressively attacking coconut trees in parts of Papua New Guinea.

Principal scientist and CRB expert Dr Trevor Jackson says the goal of the CRB task force is to coordinate efforts to understand the distribution of the different biotypes of CRB and improve management response to limit damage from the pest in Papua New Guinea.

"We're going to monitor the initial pilot sites intensively to see which ideas work for those communities and which don't work so well so we can make solid recommendations."

The initiative is part of the Pacific Awareness and Response to Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle project funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and implemented by the Pacific Community in partnership with Ag Research NZ and PNG partners National Agriculture & Quarantine Inspection Authority, Kokonas Indastri Koporesen and PNG Oil Palm Research Association which make up the CRB task force team.

The team has been meeting every year in PNG since 2020 to share their experiences and findings, which included advances made in establishing the current distribution status of the CRB; pest damage surveys, particularly along the Central-Gulf coastlines, to determine the extent of the CRB infestation in PNG; trials investigating potential biocontrol agents that could control and contain the coconut pest.

PARC project manager Dr. Mark Ero says Port Moresby has suffered a massive loss in coconut palms over the years, with coconuts now becoming expensive and being sourced outside the city.

"Our message for the people of PNG is that this is a new strain of the pest, and it's quite invasive from what we've seen. It is very hard in a country like PNG to regulate the transport of plant materials and other goods, which is one of the reasons why it has spread very quickly, so we need to work out a response that needs to be implemented country-wide. We do not want this situation to spread to other parts of PNG."

"It's important to notify local authorities like NAQIA or KIK if there's a problem, to engage in recommendations for cleaning up the breeding sites and work together to get this under control."

The pilot sites are expected to start quickly, with the first mapping of the sites and the first activity already set up by NAQIA.

The task force team will hold their 5th CRB meeting at Madang Province this week. ***(PR)***

PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY
COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
FACILITY - GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES (GSS)

GROUND MAINTENANCE SERVICES
RFQ24-CHCC/GSS-007

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, NMIAC Subchapter 140-80.1-205(1), CHCC hereby seeks the services of qualified Contractor to provide Ground Maintenance Services thru RFP24-CHCC/GSS-007.

The Request for Proposals will be available on January 25th, 2024 online at www.chcc.health, navigate to the RFP tab on the left navigation bar, click on the URL for this RFP24-CHCC/GSS-007.

A mandatory pre proposal meeting and on-site assessment will be held on January 30th, 2024 at 9:00AM at the CHC Continuing Education Room right before the cafeteria. The Statement of Confidentiality will be collected prior to the actual on-site assessment.

Contractors shall submit proposals and all supporting documents to Corazon P. Ada, Director, CHCC Division of Procurement and Supply Office located at the Main Administrative Building or via email at procurement@chcc.health no later than: 1000hrs (10:00am) Chamorro Standard Time on February 26th, 2024.

/S/ ESTHER L. MUNA
CHCC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

/S/ CORA P. ADA
DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY

PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY
COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)
FACILITY/PLANT OPERATIONS

RFP24-CHCC/FACILITY-008

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: February 26th, 2024 TIME: 10:00AM (CHST)

"FUEL, LUBRICATION AND TESTING SERVICES"

INTERESTED PARTIES CAN DOWNLOAD THIS **REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL** FROM THE CHCC WEBSITE [WWW.CHCC.HEALTH]. ONCE AT THE SITE, NAVIGATE TO REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS TAB ON THE LEFT NAVIGATION BAR. CLICK ON THE URL FOR THIS RFP. YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO ENTER DATA TO ALLOW US TO TRACK ALL REQUESTS FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY.

THE CHCC RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY AND ALL PROPOSAL AND TO WAIVE ANY IMPERFECTIONS IN ANY PROPOSAL, IF TO DO SO SHALL BE IN THE INTEREST OF THE CHCC. ALL PROPOSALS SHALL BECOME THE EXCLUSIVE PROPERTY OF THE COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION.

/S/ ESTHER L. MUNA
CHCC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

/S/ CORA P. ADA
DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION

INVITATION FOR BIDS
CUC-IFB-24-015

A-16 SEWER LIFT STATION UPGRADE

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the construction of the A-16 Sewer Lift Station Upgrade project in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The project consists of the installation of a new polymer pre-cast concrete wet well to replace the existing A-16 wet well; installation of OFCI submersible pumps and accessories; new aboveground valve station and appurtenances with concrete pad; installation of new bar screen to replace existing A-1 bar screen; rehabilitation of existing A-16 bar screen; installation of new gravity sewer mains and manholes; installation of H2S controls; reconnection to existing lift station force main; procurement of a portable pumping system with trailer and concrete pad; installation of temporary bypass pumping operations and dewatering; site improvements with new chain-link fence, two vehicular gates and a pedestrian gate; asphaltic concrete pavement driveways with partial compacted base course area; installation of new and replacement of existing gate valves; demolition of existing minor structures and electrical upgrade. The work shall be done in accordance with the Project Plans and Specifications and without disruption to the daily operation of the water system. CUC requires the Project to be completed in **Two Hundred Seventy (270) calendar days** from date of award of contract.

The project is funded by a grant from the United States of Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA.

Prospective Bidders must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by site visits will be held on **February 27, 2024 at 10:00 AM (CHST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) copies must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked **"CUC-IFB-24-015, A-16 SEWER LIFT STATION UPGRADE"** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, **no later than 10:00 AM (CHST) March 14, 2024**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered. Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement the form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

A *Bid Guarantee* of not less than fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The bid guarantee may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States, Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidder. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). *Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.*

All bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

All questions or request for clarification regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 (ChST) on March 1, 2024** to Mr. Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email at manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Ms. Nicolette Villagomez, CUC's Water/Wastewater Engineer – via email at nicolette.villagomez@cucgov.org, and Ms. Christie L. Sablan, Procurement & Supply, Senior Administrative Technician – via email at christie.sablan@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal in the best interest of the government. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

Commonwealth Utilities Corporation
P. O. Box 501220, Third Floor, Joeten Dandan Building, Saipan, MP 96950
Tel: (670) 664-4282 • Fax: (670) 235-5131

Job Vacancy Announcement

JVA No. 24-056

Opening Date: Monday, February 12, 2024
Closing Date: Monday, February 26, 2024

POSITION TITLE:	**Trades Assistant**
DEPARTMENT:	**Power Division-Transmission & Distribution**
LOCATION:	**Saipan, Northern Marianas Islands, USA**
ANNUAL SALARY:	**$16,742.00 to $22,602.00 per annum, Non-Exempt**
CONTRACT:	**Not Contracted**
POSITION(S):	**One (1)**

The incumbent will be under the overall supervision of the Power Division Manager or his/her designee.

The Trades Assistant assists with installations, repairs and general maintenance in assigned service area; and, operates motorized vehicles, equipment machinery, and hand and power tools.

Duties:

- Performs routine and preventative maintenance on equipment, vehicles, systems and/or infrastructure; performs basic inspections; and conducts basic troubleshooting of issues.
- Prepares job site for work including gathering and setting up materials and supplies, and setting work safety barriers for protection and to direct traffic flow away from work site.
- Gathers, cleans and returns equipment, materials and supplies used.
- Cleans and maintains work site after project or repair work is complete.
- Maintains grounds, trimming trees and removing obstacles.
- Services equipment by disassembling, assembling, cleaning and calibrating.
- Services and prepares oil filters.
- Assists with equipment/vehicle inspections.
- Responds to trouble calls as needed.
- Responding to customer calls.
- Performs other duties of a similar nature and level as assigned.

Minimum Requirements:
Education: High School Diploma, General Education Diploma, or Adult Basic Education.

Knowledge of: Customer service principles; Basic mathematical concepts; Safety procedures and safe work practices; Modern office technology.

Skills in: Providing customer service; Reading maps and drawings; Operating heavy and light equipment machinery, hand and power tools required of assigned area; Adhering to safety procedures and safe work practices; Prioritizing tasks and managing time for efficiency; Identifying issues and solving problems; Providing attention to detail; Taking equipment readings and recording data; Maintaining activity logs and reports; Utilizing a computer and relevant software applications; Utilizing communication and interpersonal skills as applied to interaction with coworkers, supervisor, the general public, and others to sufficiently exchange or convey information and to receive work direction.

- **Licensing:**
  - o Valid Driver's License with appropriate class.
- **Physical Demands:**
  - o Must be able to lift and carry objects weighing up to 40 pounds and over.

All applicants may be tested and all applicants are subject to pre-employment drug test.

How to Apply: Submit a completed CUC Employment Application, resume, and applicable supporting documents to the CUC Human Resources office located on the 3rd Floor of the Joeten Dandan Building on Saipan, Monday through Friday 7:30 am – 4:30 pm (Except Legal Holidays). Applicants on the island of Tinian and Rota may submit their documents to their respective CUC Administration office. Application, resume and supporting documents can also be e-mailed to: employment.applications@cucgov.org.

P. O. Box 501220, Third Floor, Joeten Dandan Building, Saipan, MP 96950
Tel: (670) 664-4282 • Fax: (670) 235-5131
CUC is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer.

NOAA conducts survey on uses, knowledge, perceptions of coral reefs

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Coral Reef Monitoring Program is engaging local surveyors to conduct a CNMI-wide survey that will collect information on residents' use of coral reefs and their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of coral reef ecosystems and coral reef management. It is part of a larger effort to improve coral reef conservation programs at local, regional, and national levels.

Pacific Coastal Research & Planning, a non-profit based on Saipan, is collaborating with the research team to facilitate local surveying efforts on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. Through this partnership, local hires will have the opportunity to be trained in social science surveying techniques and gain real world research experience in the field.

Household residents across the CNMI will be randomly selected and invited to participate in the survey, which will be offered in English, Chamorro, Refaluwasch, and Tagalog. The survey should take no longer than 20 minutes and can be completed in-person or online. The goal is to survey 500 CNMI residents by the end of April 2024.

The results from this survey will be instrumental in helping NOAA and the government of the CNMI improve coral reef conservation and the services coral reef ecosystems provide for communities. "Residents' participation in this survey is important so that the diverse voices of the CNMI are represented. This is critical for equitable and effective conservation, as coral reef management depends on understanding how people interact with and depend upon these special ecosystems," said Dr. Mary Allen, National Coral Reef Monitoring Program socioeconomic lead.

This will be the second resident survey conducted in the CNMI by NOAA's National Coral Reef Monitoring Program. Results will provide critical insights into how social conditions have changed since the first survey was conducted in 2016 and 2017. Participation in the survey is voluntary and confidential, but residents are encouraged to participate if invited. A more inclusive survey results in better quality information for use by managers of the CNMI's coral reefs and coastal communities.

For more information about this project and participating in this survey if contacted, please see:

https://www.coris.noaa.gov/monitoring/socioeconomic_cnmi_survey.html. ***(PR)***

Commonwealth Zoning Board Meeting

March 07, 2024 | 2:00 PM
Governor's Office Conference Room
Capitol Hill, Saipan
Tel: 670-234-9661/2 • Fax: 670-234-9666

AGENDA

A. Preliminary Matters
1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Adoption of Agenda
4. Adoption of Minutes – February 8, 2024
5. Communications
6. Public Comments

B. Public Hearings
1. None

C. Old Business
1. Board decision on ZONING BOARD RESOLUTION NO. 2023-12-05; To impose conditions on the Rezone process
   i. Commencement of development within six months after adoption
   ii. Reversal to original district upon failure to meet term of development
2. Nuisance Abatement and Blighted Properties Maintenance Act of 2018 Regulations

D. New Business
1. Proposed Text Amendments to the Saipan Zoning Law of 2013

E. Report from Zoning Administrator
1. Operations (Permitting & Enforcement)
2. Financial
3. Updates:
   i. Zoning's Clean-Healthy-Attractive-Safe Campaign

F. Report from Legal Counsel
G. Executive Session
H. Announcements
I. Adjournment

/s/Henry Hofschneider, Chairman

FEMA hosts job fair on March 12, 13 for reservist positions

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is actively expanding the local workforce to enhance their capacity to respond effectively to disaster events in the Pacific region. FEMA is opening reservist positions and individuals recruited through this hiring event could potentially play a crucial role in supporting ongoing relief efforts, such as response to Typhoon Mawar.

Submit your resume in advance to fema-logisticscadre-recruitment@fema.dhs.gov, or bring a current resume to a hiring fair on:

■ Tuesday, March 12, and Wednesday, March 13, 2024

10am-11am—Resume writing workshop

10am-2:30pm—Walk-in interviews

University of Guam, Jesus & Eugenia Leon Guerrero School of Business and Public Administration

303 University Drive, Uog Station, Mangilao, Guam, 96923,

Bldg. 12 Room 129

Interviews may be conducted on site, or you may be asked to participate in an interview later.

All applicants must be U.S. citizens, 18 years of age or older, and possess a high school diploma or GED. Individuals will be required to pass a background investigation that includes fingerprinting and credit check. Employees are also required to participate in mandatory direct deposit/electronic funds transfer for salary payment.

Federal resume writing webinar

To help you prepare for the hiring fair, FEMA will be hosting two federal resume writing webinars on Feb. 20 from 12pm to 1:30pm (ChST) and March 4 from 12pm to 1:30pm (ChST). You can register for these free webinars by clicking on the following link: https://fema.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN_Lj3eshrwQVWBioK-4kzCNXg. ***(PR)***

PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY
COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
FACILITY - GENERAL SUPPORT SERVICES (GSS)

HOUSEKEEPING SERVICES
RFQ24-CHCC/GSS--005

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) is a public corporation and autonomous agency of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). In accordance with its Procurement Rules and Regulations, NMIAC Subchapter 140-80.1-205(1), CHCC hereby seeks the services of qualified Contractor to Housekeeping Services to the Hospital, Outpatient Clinics, Dental, Executive Offices and Other Federal Programs thru RFP24-CHCC/GSS–005.

The Request for Proposals will be available on January 24th, 2024 online at www.chcc.health, navigate to the RFP tab on the left navigation bar, click on the URL for this RFP24-CHCC/GSS–005.

A mandatory pre proposal meeting and on-site assessment will be held on January 30th, 2024 at 9:00AM at the CHC Continuing Education Room right before the Cafeteria. The Statement of Confidentiality will be collected prior to the actual on-site assessment.

Contractors shall submit proposals and all supporting documents to Corazon P. Ada, Director, CHCC Division of Procurement and Supply Office located at the Main Administrative Building or via email at procurement.chcc@health no later than: 1000hrs (10:00 am) Chamorro Standard Time on February 26th, 2024.

/S/ ESTHER L. MUNA
CHCC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

/S/ CORA P. ADA
DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
CUC-RFP-24-011
DEBT COLLECTION LEGAL SERVICES

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC), is soliciting competitive sealed proposals from qualified and experienced entities for Debt Collection Legal Services.

The RFP Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $100.00 for one RFP package set. Perspective Entities must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply.

One (1) original and five (5) hard copies of your submission must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "**CUC-RFP-24-011, Debt Collection Legal Services**" to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 A.M.(ChST) on March 15, 2024,** Late submissions and conditional offers will not be considered.

Discussions may be conducted with responsible offerors who submit proposals determined to be reasonably susceptible of being selected for award for the purpose of clarification and to ensure full understanding of and responsiveness to solicitation requirements. All proposers shall be accorded fair and equal treatment with respect to any opportunity for discussion. During discussions, there will be no disclosure of any information derived from proposals submitted by competing proposers.

All Proposers are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the Proposer due to lack of information or understanding of the proposal requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a proposal or supply under the contract. The RFP does not commit CUC to award a contract, to pay any cost incurred in the preparation of the proposal under this request, or to procure or contract for services. The Proposers are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed as per the CUC Procurement Regulations.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered prospective proposers and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on February 23, 2024,** to Manny Sablan, CUC's Purchasing Administrator via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Bettina G. Terlaje, CUC's Chief of Administration via email betty.terlaje@cucgov.org and Marcela Tenorio, CUC's Senior Administrative Technician via email address marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals for any reason and to waive any defects in said proposal, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All proposals shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
CUC-RFP-24-014
PURCHASE AND INSTALLATION OF A NEW 2MW GENSET UNIT FOR ROTA POWER PLANT

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC), is soliciting competitive sealed proposals from qualified Contractors or Vendors for the purchase and installation of a new genset for the Rota Power Plant located in Songsong, Rota. The purchase of and installation of the new genset with approximately 2MW of total net output will improve CUC current power generation capacity needed to sustain critical electrical services to the community of Rota.

The RFP Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration for one RFP package set. Prospective proposers must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division by **March 8, 2024** to be considered.

A Pre-proposal Conference will be held on **February 22, 2024 at 9:00 AM (CHST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and five (5) hard copies of your submission must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked **"CUC-RFP-24-014, Purchase and Installation of a 2MW New Genset Unit for the Rota Power Plant"** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 A.M.(ChST) on March 19, 2024.** Proposals mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before the due date and time.

All Offerors are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the Offeror due to lack of information or understanding of the proposal requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a proposal or supply under the contract.

Discussions may be conducted with responsible proposers for the purpose of clarification and to ensure full understanding of, and responsiveness to solicitation requirements. Proposers shall be accorded fair and equal treatment. There shall be no disclosure of any information derived from proposals submitted by competing proposers.

All responses to this RFP should take into account any and all taxes which will become the obligation of the proposer awarded a contract.

This Request for Proposal does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals in anticipation of a contract. This request and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations. The contractor shall be required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered prospective proposers and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on February 27, 2024,** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org, with a copy to Alvin King, CUC Rota Resident Manager at alvin.king@cucgov.org, Richard Cano, CUC Power Generation Manager at richard.cano@cucgov.org and Marcela Tenorio, Senior Administrative Technician at marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals for any reason and to waive any defects in said proposal, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All proposals shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

Passengers of M/S *Zuiderdam* Tour Saipan

Photos provided by WALT GOODRIDGE

Holland America's M/S *Zuiderdam*, a 955-foot cruise ship with a capacity of over 1,900 passengers and 842 crew on a 127-day world voyage paid a visit to Saipan last Monday.

Herman Guerrero Jr. shares the Herman's Modern Bakery origin story.

Alvin Takai, former helper on the Seafaring Traditions Program, shares his knowledge of traditional canoe making with curious onlookers.

Carolinian elder Lino Olopai explains the fine art of celestial navigation to M/S *Zuiderdam* cruise ship passengers.

M/S *Zuiderdam* cruise ship passengers at the Japanese Tank monument along Quartermaster Road.

Author Walt Goodridge shares the tragic events of Suicide Cliff to cruise ship passengers.

Local residents Willy Kaitabu, Josephine Rabauliman, Walt Goodridge. and Alvin Takai (front row) share Saipan's beauty with guests from Holland America's M/S *Zuiderdam* on shore for a day.

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
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MEMBER

The Associated Press | Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

More bills for Trump to not pay: Another verdict against the con man

In ordering defendant Donald Trump to pay New York State more than a third of a billion dollars, Manhattan state Supreme Court Justice Arthur Engoron cited exact figures of how much Trump was improperly enriched by his cheating and lying.

Engoron used calculations from an expert witness put forward by state Attorney General Tish James, who is to be heartily congratulated for pursuing and beating Trump. Because Trump made up fraudulent statements of his financial condition (SFC)—falsely increasing or lowering the value of his holdings to suit his needs and deceive lenders and insurers—he managed to save substantial sums on interest from duped banks.

On the four loans examined, Trump saved $168,040,168 in interest, which Engoron ordered be paid to the state.

The judge also decided that Trump's fake SFC let him buy and then sell the Old Post Office in D.C., so that the nice $126,828,600 profit must also be disgorged.

The same for the $60 million Trump gained from his sale of the contract for Ferry Point golf course in the Bronx. Without the fake SFC, there would not have been Trump Links at the foot of the Whitestone Bridge. So that $60 million needs to be remitted to taxpayers. Take out the adding machine to get the full amount due of $354,868,768.

Engoron was much gentler in only barring Trump from doing business in this state for three years, instead of the lifetime prohibition that was possible. Trump's sons each got a two-year suspension, while the Trump Organization will continue to be overseen by a court appointed monitor, a retired federal judge.

In his lengthy written verdict Engoron also included a passage describing Trump and his sons: "Their complete lack of contrition and remorse borders on pathological." Your honor, everyone in America and the world knows that about this family, unfortunately.

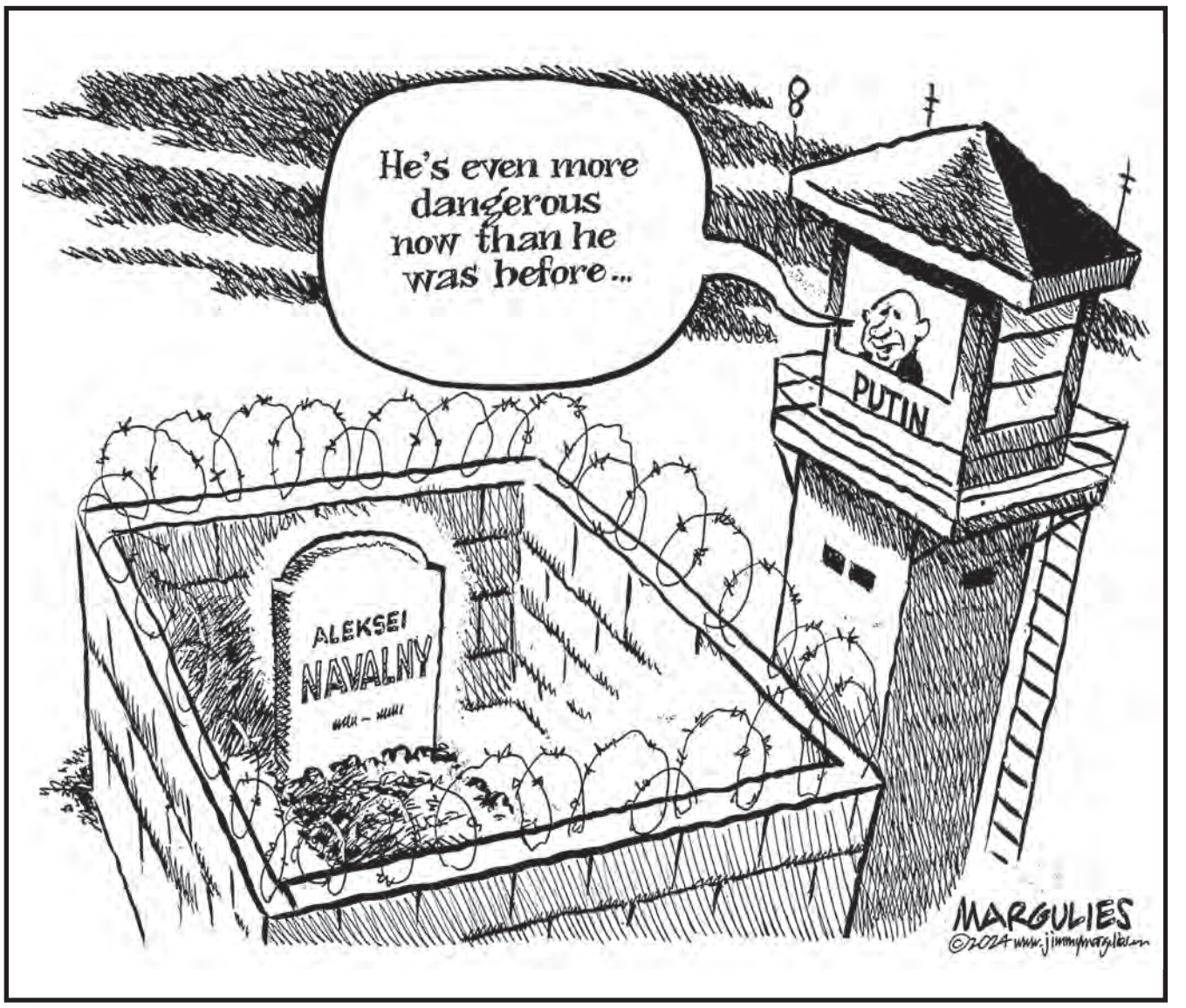
All of Trump's civil and criminal court trouble is because this con man ran and was elected president eight years ago. Before then, he was just a cheat and a liar. It was on Feb. 27, 2019, five years ago, when his convicted bag man Michael Cohen (who was convicted for crimes committed to aid Trump) told a House committee that Trump routinely played around with the value of his properties.

From that Cohen confession led to this guilty verdict. Thank you, Mr. Cohen.

It's similar for the $83,300,000 verdict Trump was ordered by a federal judge to pay E. Jean Carroll for defaming her, on top of the $5 million he already owed her. Had he never been president, it is likely there never would have been a defamation case.

And it's the same for the four criminal trials now approaching. By putting himself in the White House, Trump invited scrutiny and what investigators found was his true criminal nature, which was evident for many decades to New Yorkers, long before he had his name on a ballot.

See MORE on Page 9



It's time to ask if patriotism has lost its way

By SOLOMON D. STEVENS
Tribune News Service

Solomon D. Stevens is the author of Religion, Politics, and the Law *(co-authored with Peter Schotten) and* Challenges to Peace in the Middle East. *He wrote this for InsideSources.com.*

Patriotism is love of country, and it can be a very positive force. All countries benefit when their people feel a sense of belonging and believe in their country's goodness. But as our nation becomes more polarized and patriotism is used by some as a litmus test to judge and quickly condemn others, it makes sense to step back and ask ourselves: Has patriotism today lost its way?

Let's start with the basics. We learn from Socrates in the "Republic" (and it is confirmed by our experience) that no country is just, altogether good. It's just a fact that human beings cannot create perfection. Perhaps we can imagine what a just country would be, but we cannot make it happen. Our reason is flawed. We are all influenced by passion and prejudice. We can do our best, and sometimes we can do very well, but we are limited in what we can accomplish.

This means that our love of country should always be tempered by our knowledge that what we love is flawed. And this means that we should never love our country unconditionally. That is why it makes no sense to say, "My Country, Right or Wrong," or "Love it or Leave it!" In fact, I believe that our love is strengthened when we acknowledge our country's flaws and when we remain open to the need that every country has for change and improvement.

When we close our eyes to the fact that our country is flawed, patriotism can turn nasty. It can become defensive and angry. It can lead to the desire to strike out at, to harm, those who dare to question our vision of the country. This can turn what should be a healthy patriotism into a toxic force.

Abraham Lincoln taught us in the Gettysburg Address that our country was "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Liberty and equality. America was founded on these two lofty principles, which all Americans can be proud of. But at the same time, liberty and equality were not extended to all. Our Founders proclaimed beautiful goals, but they did not, could not, put those principles fully into practice. Our history is one of constant struggle—sometimes forward and sometimes backward—of a debate between principle and practice.

We have no reason to walk around feeling ashamed of our flawed history. There is no reason for us to hate ourselves for being human. But at the same time, we dishonor the great principles upon which our country was founded by ignoring or denying those flaws, which have harmed many and continue to do so.

In other words, a healthy patriotism includes acknowledging the limitations of the country we love. In fact, our love of country can be even stronger when we combine it with a constant desire to challenge the country to live up to its principles.

Think of what we value in good friends. Isn't it true that our best friends are the ones who tell us when we have done something wrong? None of us wants our friends to tell us how wonderful we are, even when it isn't true. And when we are being self-destructive, don't we want our friends to call us out to tell us to change? We want honesty from our friends. Patriotism at its best is the same. It thrives when it is challenged because the challenges offer opportunities for improvement.

True patriots ought to welcome those who protest particular political leaders (either Joe Biden or Donald Trump), a particular party (either Democrats or Republicans), or a particular policy (border wall or no border wall). We should welcome those who "take a knee" when our national anthem is playing. They aren't saying they hate America; they are reminding us of who we are. Healthy patriotism includes disagreement and protest.

In two years, we will be celebrating the 250th anniversary of our Declaration of Independence, which first proclaimed the principles of liberty and equality as the foundation of our country. Will we be closer to or further away from our dream of realizing those principles then? We need patriots today who will challenge us to live up to those principles and call us out when we stray from them.

My father taught me to do all things in moderation. He was a wise man, and I am grateful for this lesson. Moderation is good when it comes to food, drink and even patriotism. Everything can be overdone.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Vladimir Putin killed Alexei Navalny. It is a stark warning to the West

By TRUDY RUBIN
The Philadelphia Inquirer

Trudy Rubin is a columnist and editorial-board member for the Philadelphia Inquirer. *Readers may write to her at:* Philadelphia Inquirer, *P.O. Box 8263, Philadelphia, Pa. 19101, or by email at trubin@phillynews.com.*

Vladimir Putin killed him.

The Russian leader is as responsible for Friday's death of Alexei Navalny—that country's most fearless and famous opposition leader—as if he personally had shot him.

Navalny, who had rallied anti-Kremlin crowds across Russia before being jailed on bogus charges in 2021, died in a grim Arctic penal colony where he was serving a 19-year sentence. He was the latest in a long string of prominent Russian activists and journalists jailed, shot, or poisoned under Putin (Navalny barely survived a poisoning attempt in 2020).

Navalny

Putin

Yet Navalny was unique. His bravery and his charisma—which I observed during several interviews on trips to Moscow over the years—made him the only Russian opposition figure with national name recognition who could rouse substantial opposition to Putin.

This put him on the Kremlin's hit list.

Navalny's death is a direct challenge to U.S. politicians who praise Putin, as well as the legislators who are helping him by blocking aid to Ukraine. They and other Western leaders must hold Putin directly responsible.

Underestimating the cold-blooded killer in the Kremlin is a mistake that America cannot afford.

When I last interviewed Navalny in 2018, in his sleek, spare office far from Moscow's city center, I asked him whether he feared he might be killed. "They [the Kremlin] missed a chance when I was less popular," he explained. "Now they are afraid they will provoke rallies or worse. Right now, the cost is higher than they want, but maybe they are still saving this tool."

The reason Navalny was so popular at the time was his (and his young team's) brilliant social media campaign against Kremlin corruption on YouTube and the Telegram messaging service, which won him supporters across Russia.

A lawyer by training, banned from access to state-controlled media, he still won more than 27% of the vote in the 2013 Moscow mayoral election. He signed up 20,000 young volunteers and amassed a war chest of online contributions. "We copied Obama's method of fundraising," he told me. He also watched the HBO series The Wire, to learn the ins and outs of a U.S. mayoral campaign.

Indeed, Navalny was the first Russian politician to use U.S. campaign methods, touring every region and appealing to folks on the street, especially young people, unlike stiff Russian leaders who make limited and formal presentations. He kept building his mass movement despite ongoing threats. Green dye was thrown in his face after a rally, nearly blinding him in one eye; he was banned from running for president in 2018; his brother was imprisoned as a hostage; and he was repeatedly jailed.

His Anti-Corruption Foundation put out brilliant, hilarious videos (with English subtitles) documenting Kremlin corruption, including one in 2017 on former president and prime minister Dmitry Medvedev that spotlighted his mansions and yachts. It racked up 27 million views. A 2021 video about Putin's secret palace in southern Russia, complete with drone footage, garnered 92 million views.

His goal, Navalny told me, was to reach "blue-collar youth, not hipsters, youth who see no future" and convince them that elections didn't have to be hopeless, and that grassroots resistance was possible. "We are the biggest movement in Russia," he said.

No wonder Putin was afraid of this dynamic, attractive activist in his 40s who contrasted so dramatically with an aging, isolated president-for-life.

Putin finally applied the "tool" Navalny feared in 2020, when Russian intelligence officers tried to poison him with the banned nerve toxin Novichok, after he addressed a rally in Siberia. Miraculously, he survived when a private plane sent from Germany was able to evacuate him, and Berlin doctors helped him recover.

With typical Navalny panache, he then managed to track down one of his poisoners and trick the guy into thinking he was an FSB intelligence official requesting details on the failed operation. The man revealed, on tape, that the poison had been applied to Navalny's underpants in his hotel room, and the whole hilarious episode was included in a documentary that won an Oscar last year. (Navalny later taunted Putin from prison as "Vladimir the underpants poisoner.")

At the Oscar ceremony, Navalny's beloved wife, Yulia, accepted the award and praised her husband for "defending democracy." She said softly, "Alexei, I'm dreaming of the day when you will be free, and our country will be free."

Putin wanted Navalny dead. Yet the opposition leader chose to return to Russia from Germany in January 2021, as soon as he was well enough to travel, and was jailed when he reached the Moscow airport.

Why did he return? I asked Yevgenia Albats, one of Russia's leading independent journalists and a close friend of Navalny's. "He knew he could not be a Russian politician who asks people to protest if he was living in the luxury of Germany," she told me early last year. "Putin is still afraid of him," she added. "He does understand if anyone is capable of uniting people, it is him."

So, as Putin prepares for a sham election to return him for a fifth term as president, Navalny has been conveniently eliminated. Even in Russia's brutal, Stalin-like gulag, where Navalny's health deteriorated under the harshest of conditions, Putin couldn't break him. Now he will brush off Navalny's death as irrelevant, yet it is anything but that.

Even from prison, Navalny reminded a world of what Putin's admirers would like to forget: that Russia is not destined by the heavens for eternal dictatorship, nor must Putin's survival be seen as ordained.

Navalny opposed the Ukraine war and called last year for the return of all Russian–occupied territory in Ukraine. He issued a manifesto in February 2023 calling for an end to "the Putin regime" and the establishment of "a parliamentary republic based on … fair elections."

He died fighting for democracy and free elections—values that many Americans too often take for granted. But, as Navalny reminded us, they are never guaranteed.

Shame on MAGA legislators or any GOP candidates who praise Putin and are willing to help the Russian dictator extinguish those very values in Ukraine. Shame on those who ignore the long-term threat Putin presents to the U.S., including weaponizing space.

Navalny's death is a stark warning of the danger of underestimating Putin's determination to challenge the West—and a reminder that we must defend our own democracy in 2024.

Last night I had the strangest dream…

By JOHN M. CRISP
Tribune News Service

John M. Crisp, an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service, lives in Texas and can be reached at jcrispcolumns@gmail.com.

Most readers of a certain age will remember immediately the wistful, lilting tune that conveys this lyric: "Last night I had the strangest dream/I ever dreamed before/I dreamed the world had all agreed/To put an end to war."

This song was written in 1950 by folk singer Ed McCurdy. It reflected the devastation of World War II, the developing nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union and the mounting tension in Korea, and it anticipated the incipient Vietnam War.

In fact, "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream" was an unofficial anthem for an ambitious anti-war movement that arose in the mid-60s in response to the futile carnage in Vietnam. Songs such as "Give Peace a Chance" and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" inspired a generation to ask this hopeful question: "Suppose they gave a war and nobody came?"

This is probably a corny way to start a column that's going to end with a solemn fact: While humankind for millennia has aspired to abolish war once and for all, humans have much more often beaten their plowshares into swords than the opposite.

War is elemental to the history of humankind. Few human pursuits are more basic to our character than the will to fight.

The pacifists of the '60s often assumed that all war is bad. They had a defensible point. Modern wars, particularly, are indiscriminately destructive and are often counterproductive: They tend to create more problems than they solve. To a committed pacifist, every war is a tragedy and a failure.

But this point of view suggests that there are no values worth fighting for. There are.

Religious people might describe the world in terms of good and evil. I prefer a secular representation: The "good" in this version is the liberal world order that has prevailed since World War II. It's characterized by democracy, freedom of speech, a free press, the rule of law, tolerance, free commerce and cooperation among nations, equality and concern for the rights of individuals, including—or especially—women and children and the LGBTQ community.

At the other pole are autocracy, corruption, intolerance, contempt for the rule of law, inequality, censorship, tribalism and inferior status for the least powerful citizens.

This model of the world is theoretical, but it serves as the backdrop for the war in Ukraine, a concrete instance of a conflict that is becoming more and more global: A democracy with aspirations toward the values we treasure is threatened by a corrupt kleptocracy with no respect for the freedoms of the West. And all indications are that Vladimir Putin has no intention of stopping with Ukraine.

However, as our will to support Ukraine deteriorates, especially among Republicans, consider two principles:

First, the fact that this column is a simplification of a complicated world should not tempt us to tolerate any false equivalence between the two cultural conceptions that it describes.

When an interviewer pointed out to former president Donald Trump that Putin is a "killer," Trump said, "We got a lotta killers. You think our country's so innocent?"

This is wrong. While America has imperfections and shortcomings, we must not lose sight of the profound differences between us and Russia or China or Iran. There really is a right and a wrong.

Second, the liberal world order that has been in place since World War II was never inevitable, and force is an essential component of its preservation.

Folk singer Ed McCurdy's dream of a world without war reflects a worthy aspiration, and we can still hope and work for the happy day when diplomacy and economic and cultural pressures prevail.

History suggests a different story, however. War is a much more likely outcome. And in a world with nuclear weapons, McCurdy's dream of peace is, at every moment of conflict, vulnerable to becoming a nightmare.

This is not the way it should be; unfortunately, this is the way it is. We fail to acknowledge this at our peril.

MORE

From page 8

Sadly, there are too many Americans who are entertained and engaged by Trump and have given him their support, their votes and their contributions, money which he uses for his legal bills.

He has now started fundraising off of the Engoron verdict. The Census Bureau says the U.S. population was 335,893,238 as of Jan. 1. So all Trump needs is $1 from each.

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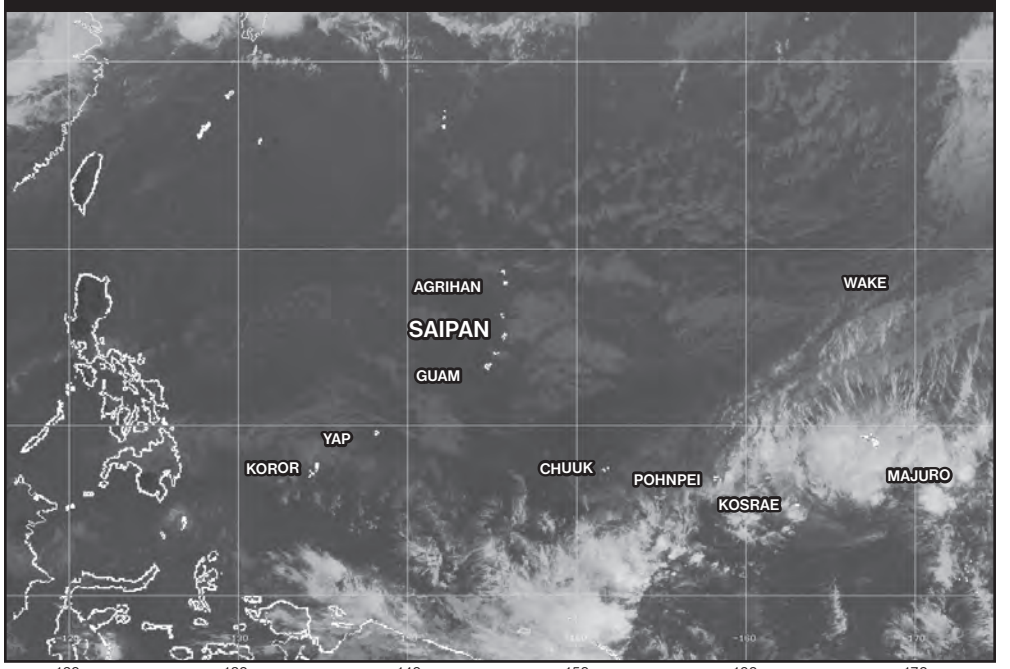
The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
Breezy. Partly sunny with isolated showers. East winds 20 to 25 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph. Lows around 77.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.
83 / 76°	84 / 77°	85 / 76°	86 / 77°	86 / 77°

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 7:57 AM WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2024

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite shows partly cloudy skies with isolated showers moving through the Marianas Waters. The Tanapag buoy reveals combined seas of 9 to 12 feet, composed mainly of northeast swell and wind waves.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	87° / 77°
Palau	Thunderstorms	85° / 77°
Yap	Partly Cloudy	85° / 78°
Chuuk	Thunderstorms	85° / 79°
Pohnpei	Thunderstorms	86° / 79°
Kosrae	Thunderstorms	84° / 78°
Majuro	Partly Cloudy	85° / 79°

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Showers	75° / 63°
Beijing	Sunny	36° / 12°
Hong Kong	Sunny	63° / 54°
Honolulu	Thunderstorms	78° / 66°
London	Partly Cloudy	37° / 30°
Los Angeles	Sunny	75° / 53°
Manila	Partly Cloudy	84° / 72°
Melbourne	Mostly Sunny	93° / 68°
Miami	Partly Cloudy	77° / 71°
New York	Partly Cloudy	43° / 30°
Osaka	Mostly Sunny	43° / 30°
Paris	Partly Cloudy	37° / 25°
Busan	Sunny	37° / 25°
Rome	Rain	55° / 46°
Salem	Partly Cloudy	69° / 55°
San Francisco	Sunny	66° / 50°
Seoul	Mostly Sunny	28° / 10°
Tokyo	Mostly Sunny	45° / 28°
Washington, DC	Partly Cloudy	47° / 32°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:38 AM	6:22 PM
Friday	6:38 AM	6:22 PM
Saturday	6:37 AM	6:23 PM
Sunday	6:37 AM	6:23 PM
Monday	6:36 AM	6:23 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	5:05 AM	4:33 PM
Friday	-	5:47 AM	5:24 PM
Saturday	-	6:25 AM	6:13 PM
Sunday	-	7:00 AM	7:00 PM
Monday	-	7:34 AM	7:45 PM

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
12:42 AM	Low Tide	-0.26
7:54 AM	High Tide	1.61
1:17 PM	Low Tide	1.01
6:00 PM	High Tide	1.58

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF FEBRUARY 1, 2024

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA193	7:50PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

OZ626/703	3:10AM	10:30PM	4, 7 via ICN
7C3403/2305	4:40AM	10:20PM	Daily
UA076/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:15AM	6:10AM	Daily
OZ626	3:10AM	6:55AM	4,7
7C3403	4:40AM	8:35AM	Daily
7C3461	2:40PM	6:45PM	Daily Feb 7-16 only
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA189	00:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA189/174	00:40AM	8:45AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
OZ702/625	12:05PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6 via ICN
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3462	11:15PM	1:30PM+1	Daily Feb 7-16 only
7C2306/3406	11:15PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3462	08:00AM	1:30PM	Daily Feb 7-16 only
7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	7:45PM	1:15AM+1	Daily
OZ625	8:20PM	1:40AM+1	3, 6
7C3404	10:15PM	3:35AM+1	Daily

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Daily
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	14:00	14:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1209	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	14:30	14:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2109	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

Business

Virtue Tailor Shop offers expert dressmaking

By MARK RABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
EDITOR

Fashion Week is virtually every day at Virtue Tailor Shop in San Antonio as its owners are expert seamsters from Saipan's old garment industry.

Owner Qian De, a native of Fujian, China who first came to Saipan in 1997 to work in a garment factory, said their business specializes in making dresses, gowns, and suits for all occasions.

Virtue Tailor Shop also makes curtains and does digital T-shirt printing, embroidery, or any other customized clothing, including hats. They also sell jewelry and bags on the side.

Aside from him and his wife Hong Mei being veterans of the garment industry, Virtue Tailor Shop is also equipped with a professional custom machine.

The equipment allows them to craft or make any type of clothes or garment from scratch.

They also don't scrimp on materials as all fabrics they use come from Guangzhou, China. Customers also have the option of bringing their own fabric for them to customize.

As for the cost, Qian said their price range is based on the style and fabric customers want customized.

Qian said he established Virtue Tailor Shop in May 2011 after the last of the garment factories on Saipan closed down, as he no longer had work and had a young family to feed.

Good thing that making good quality clothes were in such high demand on island that Virtue Tailor Shop had no trouble carving its own niche in the local economy.

MARK RABAGO

Virtue Tailor Shop is located across Royal Crown Insurance in San Antonio and is open Monday-Saturday from 9:30am to 8:30pm and Sunday from 9:30am to 8pm.

MARK RABAGO

Virtue Tailor Shop owners Qian De and Hong Mei with daughter, Li Men.

MARK RABAGO

Virtue Tailor Shop specializes in making dresses, gowns, and suits for all occasions.

MARK RABAGO

Virtue Tailor Shop also sells jewelry and bags on the side.

Nearly 13 years since and even through super typhoons Soudelor and Yutu, COVID-19, and the ensuing economic crises, Qian and his wife have persevered with the business because, in own his words, "our customers need us."

As for calling their tailoring business Virtue Tailor Shop, Qian said the name is actually derived from combining the Chinese meanings of his and his wife's first names.

Virtue Tailor Shop is located across Royal Crown Insurance in San Antonio and is open Monday-Saturday from 9:30am to 8:30pm and Sunday from 9:30am to 8pm. For more information, call (670) 235-5511/ or WhatsApp (670) 483-7762.

White House promises 'major sanctions' on Russia in response to Navalny's death

WASHINGTON (AP)—The White House said Tuesday it is preparing additional "major sanctions" on Russia in response to opposition leader Alexei Navalny's death last week in an Arctic penal colony.

National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the sanctions, on the eve of the two-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "will be a substantial package covering a range of different elements of the Russian defense industrial base, and sources of revenue for the Russian economy that power Russia's war machine, that power Russia's aggression, and that power Russia's repression."

National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said the U.S. had not determined how Navalny had died, but insisted that the ultimate responsibility lay with Putin.

"Regardless of the scientific answer, Putin's responsible for it," he told reporters.

Russian authorities have said the cause of Navalny's death is still unknown and have refused to release his body for the next two weeks as the preliminary inquest continues, members of his team said.

The Treasury Department declined to comment on the details of the upcoming sanctions. Brian Nelson, the department's Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, is in Europe this week to continue working on Russia sanctions ahead of the invasion's two-year anniversary.

"The global coalition imposing unprecedented sanctions on Russia's war machine has thrown sand in the gears of the Kremlin's efforts to equip and supply its military. President Biden recently expanded Treasury's authorities to target those funding Russia's war production efforts—even if they're located in third countries—and Treasury is aggressively pursuing those who attempt to evade our sanctions," the Treasury department said last week. "Multilateral sanctions and export controls have forced hard tradeoffs for Putin and damaged his ability to project power now and in the future."

So far, the U.S. and its allies have sanctioned thousands of Russian people and firms, frozen Russian Central Bank funds, banned certain Russian goods, restricted Russian banks' access to SWIFT—the dominant system for global financial transactions—and imposed a $60-per-barrel price cap on Russian oil and diesel, among other measures.

Policy experts have advanced an array of proposals meant to further starve Russia of the money it needs to continue its invasion—from seizing the nation's Central Bank funds housed largely in Europe to lowering the Group of Seven price cap in Russian oil.

A February working paper from the International Working Group on Russian Sanctions at Stanford University calls for heavier sanctions in Russia's energy market—from lowering the current $60 price cap on Russian-produced oil to $30, as well as completing the EU and G7 ban on Russian hydrocarbons.

Asked about more sanctions on Russia during a Council on Foreign Relations media briefing Tuesday, Stephen Sestanovich, a senior fellow for Russian and Eurasian studies at the organization, said "the choices are rather limited—but it's not zero."

Sestanovich said it is also possible that the U.S. and allies could lower the price cap on Russian oil, since it is an area where "the U.S. and EU have not been particularly aggressive."

"They could try to go lower and put the squeeze on and force the Russians to sell more oil at a discount," he said, adding that he anticipates the U.S. to impose more personal sanctions on Russian officials.

Many small business owners see 2024 as 'make or break' year, survey shows

NEW YORK (AP)—About 40% of small business owners think 2024 will be a "make or break" year for their business, according to a survey by messaging service Slack.

After several years of dealing with the pandemic, rising inflation and a tight job market, some small businesses—32% of respondents—aren't sure they'll make it through 2024.

Still, others are feeling optimistic about the future. Seventy-one percent of respondents said they are optimistic about the state of their business this year. But many are still facing tough issues like a volatile economy, a polarizing election on the horizon and declining sales.

In fact, 38% of small business owners said they're more worried about their business as they enter 2024 than they were as 2023 started. And only only 26% are less worried.

Despite those concerns, almost three quarters of business owners said they're taking steps to help improve their business. About half of the respondents said they're expanding marketing efforts to bring in new customers, 45% said they're setting money aside for emergency use, and 43% said they're exploring new technologies to increase productivity and efficiency.

"The state of small businesses in 2024 reflects a clear desire to maximize efficiency with limited resources," said Jaime DeLanghe, vice president of product management at Slack.

The survey included 2,000 small business owners—half of them in the tech or retail industries.

Nation

Election officials in US face daunting challenges in 2024

» And Congress isn't coming to help

WASHINGTON (AP)— With election season already underway, some state election officials are expressing frustration that Congress has yet to allocate federal money they have come to rely on to help cover the costs of securing their systems from attacks, updating equipment and training staff.

Election officials face a long list of challenges this year, including potential cyberattacks waged by foreign governments, criminal ransomware gangs attacking computer systems and the persistence of election misinformation that has led to harassment of election officials and undermined public confidence.

Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson said it was "demoralizing and disappointing" that the federal government hasn't committed to investing in this year's presidential election.

"We are managing federal elections that are the foundation of who has power at the federal level and trying to manage a lot of different competing risks and challenges that have only escalated in recent years," said Benson, a Democrat. "It makes us feel like we're on our own."

Since the 2016 election and the federal government's decision to add the nation's voting systems to its list of critical infrastructure, Congress has sent $995 million to states for election administration and security needs.

AP

Election judges demonstrate the accuracy of the city's voting equipment on Oct. 28, 2022, in Minneapolis.

In Colorado, the money has been used to develop a system for voters to track their ballots and pay for training for election officials. Florida officials designated the money for increasing security of the state's voter registration system. Elsewhere, federal money has been used to replace voting machines and add cybersecurity staff.

Most of that was allocated ahead of the 2020 election, as states rushed to boost cybersecurity defenses, and has been exhausted. A separate $400 million was required to be spent on pandemic-related election costs in 2020.

The last chunk of election-related funding was $75 million approved by Congress in December 2022. State allocations ranged from $5.8 million for California to $1 million for Nevada.

"Los Angeles elections alone costs $75 million," said Kathy Boockvar, the former chief elections official in Pennsylvania. "I don't think election officials have had expectations of $400 million. People have hoped for $75 million, and it's unclear whether even that will come."

Federal budget negotiations have been mired in partisan disputes, with agencies mostly operating on spending levels approved for 2023. Congress has been able to approve only temporary funding plans, which cover a few months at a time. The next deadline is March 1, when the most recent temporary funding plan expires for some departments and a week later for others. The government faces a potential shutdown if new funding is not approved.

Even if a deal is reached, there's no guarantee of new money for elections. House Republicans last year listed election security grants as "wasteful spending" and did not allocate money for it in their spending proposal. Instead, they have been focused on legislation that would ban private organizations from providing money to election offices.

"Americans deserve to have confidence in our elections, which means elections should be free from undue private influence," U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil, a Wisconsin Republican who chairs the Committee on House Administration, said at a recent hearing.

A $75 million Senate proposal for election security is being negotiated as part of the final spending package.

"Administering free and fair elections is year-round work that takes planning and resources, and election officials on the front lines of our democracy need a steady stream of funding so that they can do things like replace aging equipment, strengthen cybersecurity, and keep pace with new technology," U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Democrat from Minnesota, said in a statement.

In North Carolina, state election officials have had to make some tough decisions as the needs have outpaced state and federal funding.

North Carolina's State Board of Elections has reduced its cybersecurity staff by one employee and has been forced to cut back in other areas to meet some of the needs for election security, said Karen Brinson Bell, the agency's executive director. A team of six employees that had been handling election data has been reduced to just one full-time position, with another person helping part-time. Some eliminated positions were funded by federal grants that are no longer available.

Nikki Haley vows to keep fighting Donald Trump

GREENVILLE, S.C. (AP)— There are no wins on the horizon for Nikki Haley.

Those close to the former United Nations ambassador, the last major Republican candidate standing in Donald Trump's path to the GOP's 2024 presidential nomination, are privately bracing for a blowout loss in her home state's primary election in South Carolina on Saturday. And they cannot name a state where she is likely to beat Trump in the coming weeks.

But in an emotional address on Tuesday, Haley declared, "I refuse to quit."

And in an interview, she vowed to stay in the fight against Trump at least until after Super Tuesday's slate of more than a dozen contests on March 5—even if she suffers a big loss in her home state Saturday.

"Ten days after South Carolina, another 20 states vote. I mean, this isn't Russia. We don't want someone to go in and just get 99% of the vote," Haley told The Associated Press. "What is the rush? Why is everybody so panicked about me having to get out of this race?"

In fact, some Republicans are encouraging Haley to stay in the campaign even if she continues to lose—potentially all the way to the Republican National Convention in July in the event the 77-year-old former president, perhaps the most volatile major party frontrunner in U.S. history, becomes a convicted felon or stumbles into another major scandal.

As Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement presses for her exit, a defiant Haley on Tuesday repeatedly likened Trump to Democratic President Joe Biden—and both as too old, too divisive and too unpopular to be the only options for voters this fall.

She also pushed back when asked if there is any primary state where she can defeat Trump.

"Instead of asking me what states I'm gonna win, why don't we ask how he's gonna win a general election after spending a full year in a courtroom?"

History would suggest Haley has no chance of stopping Trump.

Never before has a Republican lost even the first two primary contests, as Haley has by an average of 21 points, and gone on to win the party's presidential nomination. Polls suggest she is a major underdog in her home state on Saturday and in the 16 Super Tuesday contests to follow. And since he announced his first presidential bid in 2015, every effort by a Republican to blunt Trump's rise has failed.

Yet she is leaning into the fight.

Lest anyone question her commitment, Haley's campaign is spending more than $500,000 on a new television advertising campaign set to begin running Wednesday in Michigan ahead of the state's Feb. 27 primary, according to spokesperson Olivia Perez-Cubas. At the same time, the AP has obtained Haley's post-South Carolina travel schedule that features 11 separate stops in seven days across Michigan, Minnesota, Colorado, Utah, Virginia, Washington, D.C., North Carolina and Massachusetts.

The schedule also includes at least 10 high-dollar private fundraising events.

Indeed, Haley's expansive base of big- and small-dollar donors is donating at an extraordinary pace despite her underwhelming performance at the polls. That's a reflection of persistent Republican fears about Trump's ability to win over independents and moderate voters in the general election and serious concerns about his turbulent leadership should he return to the White House.

Biden wants people to know most of money he's seeking for Ukraine would be spent in US

MESQUITE, Texas (AP)— At a bustling construction site outside of Dallas, there are hopes that Congress can finally pass nearly $95 billion in foreign aid including funding for Ukraine—because factory jobs in the United States depend on that money.

Aerospace and defense company General Dynamics' new factory in the Dallas suburb of Mesquite is expected to initially employ 150 people to produce munitions. Set to open in June, construction is nearing completion, with newly planted trees and shrubs already in place at the complex overlooking one of the area's busiest interstates.

"We want to increase our wages and increase our skill levels and job opportunities," said Kim Buttram, Mesquite's director of economic development, who added that the factory is expected to have over 300 jobs when it's at full production.

As President Joe Biden pushes House Republicans to pass needed aid, he wants voters to understand that nearly two-thirds—or nearly $40 billion—of the money for Ukraine would actually go to U.S. factories spread out across the country including plants in Lima, Ohio and Scranton, Pennsylvania as well as Mesquite.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has refused to put the bill up for a vote on the House floor on the premise that it does not meet the needs of the American public.

The supplemental spending measure contains a total of $95 billion in foreign aid, including money for Ukraine, Israel and other countries. Of the $60.7 billion for Ukraine, $38.8 billion would go to U.S. factories that make missiles, munitions and other gear, according to figures provided to The Associated Press by the Biden administration.

"While this bill sends military equipment to Ukraine," Biden said Tuesday, "it spends the money right here in the United States of America in places like Arizona, where the Patriot missiles are built; and Alabama, where the Javelin missiles are built; and Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Texas, where artillery shells are made."

World

US vetoes UN resolution demanding immediate cease-fire in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS (AP)—The United States on Tuesday vetoed an Arab-backed and widely supported U.N. resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war in the embattled Gaza Strip, saying it would interfere with negotiations on a deal to free hostages abducted in Israel.

The vote in the 15-member Security Council was 13-1 with the United Kingdom abstaining, reflecting the strong support from countries around the globe for ending the war, which started when Hamas militants invaded southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking 250 others hostage. Since then, more than 29,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military offensive, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which says the vast majority were women and children.

It was the third U.S. veto of a Security Council resolution demanding a cease-fire in Gaza and came a day after the United States circulated a rival resolution that would support a temporary cease-fire linked to the release of all hostages.

Virtually every council member—including the United States—expressed concern at the impending catastrophe in Gaza's southern city of Rafah, where some 1.5 million Palestinians have sought refuge, if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu goes ahead with his plan to evacuate civilians and move Israel's military offensive to the area bordering Egypt, where Israel says Hamas fighters are hiding.

Before the vote, Algeria's U.N. Ambassador Amar Bendjama, the Arab representative on the council, said: "A vote in favor of this draft resolution is a support to the Palestinians right to life. Conversely, voting against it implies an endorsement of the brutal violence and collective punishment inflicted against them."

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield countered by saying the United States understands the desire for urgent action but believes the resolution would "negatively impact" sensitive negotiations on a hostage deal and a pause in fighting for at least six weeks. If that happens, "we can take the time to build a more enduring peace," she said.

The proposed U.S. resolution, she said, "would do what this text does not—pressure Hamas to take the hostage deal that is on the table and help secure a pause that allows humanitarian assistance to reach Palestinian civilians in desperate need."

She told reporters the Arab draft did not link the release of the hostages to a cease-fire, which would give Hamas a halt to fighting without requiring it to take any action. That would mean "that the fighting would have continued because without the hostage releases we know that the fighting is going to continue," she said.

Israel's U.N. Ambassador Gilad Erdan said the word cease-fire is used in the Security Council, the General Assembly and by U.N. officials "as if it is a silver bullet, a magical solution to all of the region's problems."

He called that "an absurd notion," warning that a cease-fire in Gaza would enable Hamas to rearm and regroup and "their next attempted genocide against Israelis will only be a question of when, not if."

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador, shot back that the "message given today to Israel with this veto is that it can continue to get away with murder."

He warned that more babies will be killed and orphaned, more children will die of hunger, cold and disease, more families will be threatened with further forced displacement, and Gaza's entire 2.3 million population will be left without food, water, medicine and shelter.

And in a sharply critical message to the United States, Israel's closest ally, Mansour said: "It means that human lives that could have been saved are instead being forsaken to Israel's genocidal war machine, deliberately, knowingly, by those who oppose a cease-fire."

What happens next remains to be seen.

Navalny's mother appeals to Putin to release son's body so she can bury him with dignity

The mother of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny appealed Tuesday to President Vladimir Putin to intervene and turn her son's body over to her so she can bury him with dignity.

Lyudmila Navalnaya, who has been trying to get his body since Saturday, appeared in a video outside the Arctic penal colony where Navalny died on Friday.

"For the fifth day, I have been unable to see him. They wouldn't release his body to me. And they're not even telling me where he is," a black-clad Navalnaya said in the video, with the barbed wire of Penal Colony No. 3 in Kharp, about 1,900 kilometers (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow.

"I'm reaching out to you, Vladimir Putin. The resolution of this matter depends solely on you. Let me finally see my son. I demand that Alexei's body is released immediately, so that I can bury him like a human being," she said in the video, which was posted to social media by Navalny's team.

Russian authorities have said the cause of Navalny's death is still unknown and refused to release his body for the next two weeks as the preliminary inquest continues, members of his team said.

They accused the government of stalling to try to hide evidence. On Monday, Navalny's widow, Yulia, released a video accusing Putin of killing her husband and alleged the refusal to release his body was part of a cover-up.

"They are cowardly and meanly hiding his body, refusing to give it to his mother and lying miserably," she said.

Lyudmila Navalnaya and her son's lawyers went to law enforcement agencies and the morgue where the body is believed to be held in the Arctic region, but were unable to get them to turn it over or say where it is. ***(AP)***

WORLD BRIEFS

Putin says Russia has no intention of putting nuclear weapons in space, denying US claims

MOSCOW (AP)—Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Tuesday that Moscow has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons in space, claiming that the country has only developed space capabilities similar to those of the U.S. Putin's statement follows the White House confirmation last week that Russia has obtained a "troubling" anti-satellite weapon capability, although such a weapon is not operational yet. White House national security spokesman John Kirby said it would violate the international Outer Space Treaty, but declined to comment on whether the weapon is nuclear-capable. The treaty signed by more than 130 countries, including Russia, prohibits the deployment of "nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction" in orbit or the stationing of "weapons in outer space in any other manner." The White House said it would look to engage the Russians directly on the concerns.

Food deliveries into northern Gaza halted because of war's chaos, increasing famine risk

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP)—The World Food Program said Tuesday it has paused deliveries of food to isolated northern Gaza because of increasing chaos across the territory, hiking fears of potential starvation. A study by the U.N. children's agency warned that one in six children in the north are acutely malnourished. Entry of aid trucks into the besieged territory has been more than halved in the past two weeks, according to U.N. figures. Overwhelmed U.N. and relief workers said intake of trucks and distribution have been crippled by Israeli failure to ensure convoys' safety amid its bombardment and ground offensive and by a breakdown in security, with hungry Palestinians frequently overwhelming trucks to take food.

WikiLeaks founder Assange faces last legal roll of dice in Britain to avoid US extradition

LONDON (AP)—Julian Assange's lawyers opened a final U.K. legal challenge Tuesday to stop the WikiLeaks founder from being sent to the United States to face spying charges, arguing that American authorities are seeking to punish him for exposing serious criminal acts by the U.S. government. Lawyer Edward Fitzgerald said Assange may "suffer a flagrant denial of justice" if he is sent to the U.S. At a two-day High Court hearing, Assange's attorneys are asking judges to grant a new appeal, his last legal roll of the dice in Britain. Assange himself was not in court. Judge Victoria Sharp said he was granted permission to come from Belmarsh Prison for the hearing, but had chosen not to attend. Fitzgerald said the 52-year-old Australian was unwell. Stella Assange, his wife, said Julian had wanted to attend, but that his health was "not in good condition."

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Environment

Dandelions and shrubs to replace rubber:

Are alternative crops realistic?

By MELINA WALLING
Associated Press

Katrina Cornish spends her days raising dandelions and desert shrubs. She harvests the stretchy rubber substances they produce and uses special machines to dip them into condoms, medical gloves and parts for trachea tubes. And she thinks those products could forever alter the landscape of agriculture in the United States.

Cornish, a professor at Ohio State University who studies rubber alternatives, isn't the only one pouring energy into alternative crops like that desert shrub, guayule, or the rubber dandelions that bloom with yellow petals in the greenhouse where Cornish works. In Arizona, too, guayule thrives amidst drought, its blue-green leaves set apart from dry dirt at a research and development farm operated by the tire company Bridgestone. And in Nebraska and other parts of the central U.S., green grasses of sorghum spring up, waving with reddish clusters of grains.

They're not the corn, soybeans, wheat or cotton that have dominated those areas for decades. Instead, they're crops that many companies, philanthropic organizations and national and international entities tout as promising alternatives to fight climate change. But while some researchers and farmers are optimistic about the potential of these crops, many of which are more water-efficient and important in certain parts of the world to fight hunger, they also say drastic changes would need to happen in markets and processing before we ever see fields full of these out-of-the-box plants or many products in stores made with them, especially in the United States.

Most rubber processing happens overseas, and the U.S. isn't prepared to process rubber domestically. But Cornish also says the threats of disease, climate change and international trade tensions also mean that it would be a smart investment to work on growing and processing domestic alternatives.

With sorghum, too, grown for people to eat as well as for farm animals or even pet food, processing would need to be scaled up, said Nate Blum, chief executive officer of Sorghum United, an international non-governmental organization focused on spreading awareness about sorghum. Though the U.S. is the world's largest producer of sorghum, it still represents only a small fraction of acres grown compared to commodity crops like corn and soybeans. And though corn and soybeans are heavily incentivized in the U.S., Blum is hopeful that consumer demand will encourage more investment in the sorghum and millets industry.

However, farmers are more likely to plant whatever crops get subsidies, said James Gerber, a senior scientist with climate solutions nonprofit Project Drawdown. Gerber, who recently published a paper in Nature Food about which crops will continue to see yield growth and which may stagnate in the coming years, said comparing sorghum production in India and the U.S. illustrates this principle. India has invested heavily in improving sorghum yields there, but the U.S. has not, he said.

Still, Blum thinks there are real benefits to pursue with sorghum, and perhaps more urgent benefits in other parts of the world than in the U.S. On the heels of last year, when the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization declared a focus on millets including sorghum, Blum thinks there's still much more to be done. "The end of the international year is not the end. It's actually just the beginning," he said.

With climate change bearing down on agriculture around the world, the need for crops that can withstand extreme weather like persistent drought is especially important in parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia where smallholder farmers rely on just a few acres of land. Some of the breeding programs for those crops are based in the U.S., but they are much less frequently included in the American diet or lifestyle.

That's why specialty markets will be critical if these crops have any hope of taking off here, Cornish said. She thinks that, just as Tesla opened up the possibility of mainstream electric cars by first marketing the product as a luxury good, premium goods like condoms, trachea tube parts and radiation-rated surgical gloves need to be made with dandelion and guayule to inspire producers to grow more meaningful amounts of either of those crops.

"You can't do it without going to that route because you have no economies of scale, and you do not have enough to go into markets that require a large amount," Cornish said.

Guayule is "clearly a specialty crop and probably always will be" in terms of acres grown, said Bill Niaura, Bridgestone's executive director of sustainable innovation. He said that Bridgestone's work on guayule has been strictly in the research and development realm for about the last ten years, and only within the past two years or so has the company been transitioning it into an exploratory business. "You're trying to develop a new industry for the Americas that currently doesn't exist," he said.

In the meantime, farmers in the U.S. rely on an agricultural economy built on scale, so they farm the crops that allow them options of where to sell, said Curt Covington, senior director of institutional business at AgAmerica Lending, a private investment manager and lender focused on agricultural land. He added that the bankers financing those farmers often don't want to take the risk on a full switch to a crop that doesn't have established markets. That, he said, could be a problem for the country as climate change exacerbates threats to crops like cotton and alfalfa, thirsty crops grown in the Southwest, in the future.

Farmers in Arizona have already had to fallow land, stopping their planting altogether and sometimes struggling with or giving up on family businesses as a result of Colorado River water cuts. Though guayule only uses half as much water as cotton and alfalfa, if the economics don't support it, that doesn't do the majority of farmers much good.

"Ultimately what you end up with is potential for, honestly, a lot of fallowed land, and that same crop being imported into this country from other countries," Covington said. "And so to me that creates a security risk for this country."

That's something Cornish thinks can be prevented, she says, by reimagining the United States not as a land dominated by waves of grain, but also as a dominant producer of natural rubber.

"My job isn't done until this is a permanent feature of the landscape," she said.

AP

❶ Katrina Cornish, a professor at Ohio State University who studies rubber alternatives, harvests rubber dandelion seeds inside a greenhouse, Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024, in Wooster, Ohio. ❷ Rubber dandelions grown inside a greenhouse, Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024, in Wooster, Ohio. ❸ Guayule plants grow at the Bridgestone Bio Rubber farm Monday, Feb. 5, 2024, in Eloy, Ariz. ❹ Angel Dias, Independent Contractor, works in a greenhouse with guayule plants at the Bridgestone Bio Rubber farm Monday, Feb. 5, 2024, in Eloy, Ariz.

Life & Style

WELCOME TO THE 'HOTEL CALIFORNIA' CASE

The trial over handwritten lyrics to an Eagles classic

NEW YORK (AP)—In the mid-1970s, the Eagles were working on a spooky, cryptic new song.

On a lined yellow pad, Don Henley, with input from band co-founder Glenn Frey, jotted thoughts about "a dark desert highway" and "a lovely place" with a luxurious surface and ominous undertones. And something on ice, perhaps caviar or Taittinger—or pink Champagne?

The song, "Hotel California," became one of rock's most indelible singles. And nearly a half-century later, those handwritten pages of lyrics-in-the-making have become the center of an unusual criminal trial set to open Wednesday.

Rare-book dealer Glenn Horowitz, former Rock & Roll Hall of Fame curator Craig Inciardi and memorabilia seller Edward Kosinski are charged with conspiring to own and try to sell manuscripts of "Hotel California" and other Eagles hits without the right to do so.

The three have pleaded not guilty, and their lawyers have said the men committed no crime with the papers, which they acquired via a writer who'd worked with the Eagles. But the Manhattan district attorney's office says the defendants connived to obscure the documents' disputed ownership, despite knowing that Henley said the pages were stolen.

Clashes over valuable collectibles abound, but criminal trials like this are rare. Many fights are resolved in private, in lawsuits or with agreements to return the items.

AP

Members of The Eagles, from left, Timothy B. Schmit, Don Henley, Glenn Frey and Joe Walsh pose with an autographed guitar after a news conference at the Sundance Film Festival, Jan. 19, 2013, in Park City, Utah.

"If you can avoid a prosecution by handing over the thing, most people just hand it over," said Travis McDade, a University of Illinois law professor who studies rare document disputes.

Of course, the case of the Eagles manuscripts is distinctive in other ways, too.

The prosecutors' star witness is indeed that: Henley is expected to testify between Eagles tour stops. The nonjury trial could offer a peek into the band's creative process and life in the fast lane of '70s stardom.

At issue are over 80 pages of draft lyrics from the blockbuster 1976 "Hotel California" album, including words to the chart-topping, Grammy-winning title cut. It features one of classic rock's most recognizable riffs, best-known solos and most oft-quoted—arguably overquoted—lines: "You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave."

Henley has said the song is about "the dark underbelly of the American dream."

It still was streamed over 220 million times and got 136,000 radio spins last year in the U.S. alone, according to the entertainment data company Luminate. The "Hotel California" album has sold 26 million copies nationwide over the years, bested only by an Eagles' greatest hits disc and Michael Jackson's "Thriller."

The pages also include lyrics from songs including "Life in the Fast Lane" and "New Kid in Town." Eagles manager Irving Azoff has called the documents "irreplaceable pieces of musical history."

Horowitz, Inciardi and Kosinki are charged with conspiracy to possess stolen property and various other offenses.

They're not charged with actually stealing documents. Nor is anyone else, but prosecutors will still have to establish that the documents were stolen. The defense maintains that's not true.

Much turns on the Eagles' interactions with Ed Sanders, a writer who also co-founded the 1960s counterculture rock band the Fugs. He worked in the late '70s and early '80s on an authorized Eagles biography that was never published.

Sanders isn't charged in the case. A phone message seeking comment was left for him.

He sold the pages to Horowitz, who then sold them to Inciardi and Kosinski.

Horowitz has handled huge rare book and archive deals, and he's been entangled in some ownership spats before. One involved papers linked to "Gone With the Wind" author Margaret Mitchell. It was settled.

Inciardi worked on notable exhibitions for the Cleveland-based Rock Hall of Fame. Kosinski has been a principal in Gotta Have It! Collectibles, known for auctioning celebrities' personal possessions—so personal that Madonna unsuccessfully sued to try to stop a sale that included her latex briefs.

Henley told a grand jury he never gave the biographer the lyrics, according to court filings from Kosinski's lawyers. But defense lawyers have signaled that they plan to probe Henley's memory of the time.

"We believe that Mr. Henley voluntarily provided the lyrics to Mr. Sanders," attorney Scott Edelman said in court last week.

Sanders told Horowitz in 2005 that while working on the Eagles book, he was sent whatever papers he wanted from Henley's home in Malibu, California, according to the indictment.

Then Kosinski's business offered some pages at auction in 2012. Henley's attorneys came knocking. And Horowitz, Inciardi and Sanders, in varying combinations, began batting around alternate versions of the manuscripts' provenance, the indictment says.

Hosting mother-in-law complains for all to hear

DEAR ABBY: My husband and I have been married three years, and we generally trade off spending holidays with each of our families. Because neither set of our parents is willing to travel to us, we go to them.

My mother-in-law takes great pride in hosting and sets a beautiful table. She'll spend an entire day in the kitchen, forgoing visiting with guests and wearing herself out to present an amazing dinner. If this brought her pleasure, there wouldn't be a problem. But, Abby, she complains bitterly about how tired she is, how much her feet hurt, how much work it is to have people in her home and how she resents it.

The thing is, she won't let us help. I've offered each time to help her cook, bring dishes made ahead of time or take a turn so she can sit down. Each time I have been sternly rebuffed, as if I've asked something embarrassing. When I tried leading the cleanup crew, her response was a hard no. I even suggested I come a day early and help with prep work, also no. I'm pretty sure she tells her friends she has lazy kids. Suggestions?

BAFFLED IN PENNSYLVANIA

DEAR BAFFLED: Your mother-in-law appears to love to suffer. She is a martyr, so PLEASE stop attempting to deprive her of her pleasure. Try as you will (and have), you can't change her. Of course, you and her son could offer to take her and Dad OUT for a lovely dinner. If you haven't already experienced enough rejection from the woman, you could give it a try. But don't be surprised if she refuses the offer or takes this personally. What she may say to her friends about you should not affect you.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I'd like your opinion regarding the financial help I give my sister. When her husband passed 18 months ago, it was clear she needed some help each month. I've been sending her $200, which I can afford for now. (My husband and I are on Social Security.)

Eight months ago, she took in an old acquaintance for the purpose of collecting room rent. Turns out he can't or won't work, and she is supporting him now as well as sharing her bed. Also, their past relationship was disastrous. Both of them were alcoholics at the time. She has now resumed drinking with him, after having quit a few years ago.

Abby, I don't want my dislike for her lifestyle to impact my financial help, but on the other hand, I feel I'm being taken advantage of. Should I keep sending her money?

SOUR SISTER IN ILLINOIS

DEAR SISTER: Have a talk with Sissy. Tell her you have been sending her money because you felt she needed it after the death of her husband. Then remind her that she has a new partner in her home, her life and her bed, and HE should be contributing—which is why you will no longer be sending her money. She needs to hear it.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY

By Abigail Van Buren
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

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Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

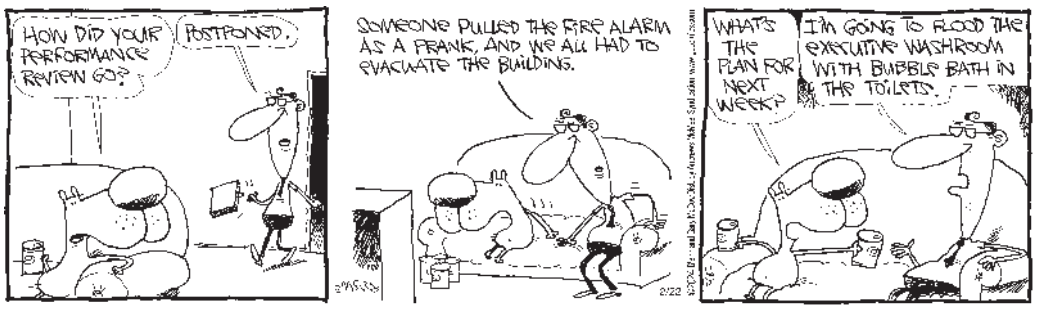
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset

OKAY. THE NUCLEAR COFFEE SHOULD KICK IN ANY..
PHPWING2!
WOW. THAT WAS THE KICK-IN?
THAT WAS THE PRE-KICK-IN. YOU SHOULD PROBABLY GET OUT OF HERE.
CLEAR THE AREA, PEOPLE!

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy


HOW DID YOUR PERFORMANCE REVIEW GO?
POSTPONED.
SOMEONE PULLED THE FIRE ALARM AS A PRANK, AND WE ALL HAD TO EVACUATE THE BUILDING.
WHAT'S THE PLAN FOR NEXT WEEK?
I'M GOING TO FLOOD THE EXECUTIVE WASHROOM WITH BUBBLE BATH IN THE TOILETS.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Curved line, in music
5 Play segment
8 Classic Fords
12 Sped
13 Expected
14 Singer India.—
15 Hot dog holder
16 1040 org.
17 Jekyll's bad side
18 Discounted
20 "See ya!"
22 "No argument here!"
26 Jabs
29 Scrap
30 Nay undoer
31 Make — dash for
32 Six-pack muscles
33 Gladys Knight's backup
34 Hostel
35 Boxer Laila
36 Speeding penalties
37 Part of a square
40 "— Lang Syne"
41 Eggnog sprinkling
45 Lowly worker
47 Twosome
49 Shakespearean villain
50 Starting
51 "— the Walrus"
52 Final Four org.
53 Tactic
54 Born
55 Dispatched

DOWN
1 Houston pro, locally
2 Lake bird
3 Web addresses
4 Handed off
5 Farewell
6 Mangy mutt
7 Perfume samplers
8 Christine of "Chicago Hope"
9 Make another attempt
10 Carried out
11 "Didn't I tell you?
19 Part of UCLA
21 Gallery display
23 Small songbird
24 Ballyhoo
25 Dick Tracy's love
26 Twosome
27 Hotel chain
28 Down Under hopper
32 Magic lamp owner
33 Bakery pans
35 Part of NATO
36 Winter ailment
38 Taking offense
39 Garden statuette
42 Spiked club
43 Novelist Jennifer
44 Capricorn
45 Enervate
46 Night school subj.
48 Dubai's country, for short

Solution time: 24 mins.

		B	I	B			S	T	P			
	W	I	N	E		S	H	I	F	D		
G	E	N	R	E		T	A	T	T	O	O	
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			D	U	N	E			A	L	K	A
	M	O	O	N	S		M	F	D	F	A	
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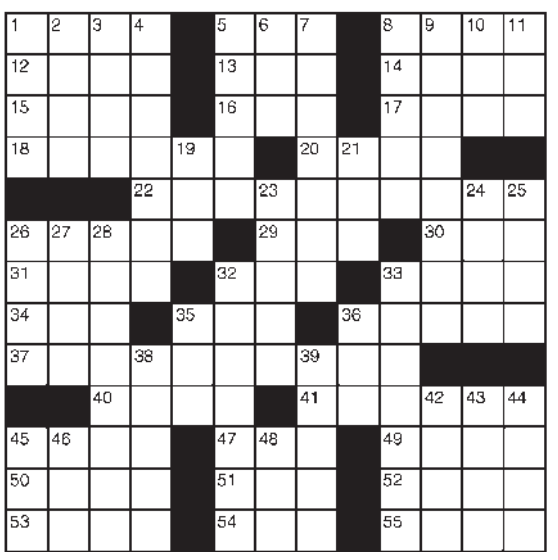
			S	S	R			D	O	H		

Yesterday's answer 2-22



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955!** 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Drew Barrymore, 49; Thomas Jane, 55; Jeri Ryan, 56; Kyle MacLachlan, 65.

Happy Birthday: Stick to what you know and do best, and maximize your skills, knowledge and experience. Dive into what's familiar, and you'll discover new and exciting ways to achieve what you want this year. A solid plan and willingness to adjust as you move forward will lead to a smooth transition from where you are to the results you desire. Your numbers are 7, 15, 26, 28, 33, 38, 46.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19)*: Attend to business and move on to events that propagate precious moments, love and new ways to make a difference. Personal improvements that boost confidence and encourage you to participate in events that stretch your mind and make you aware of the possibilities are favored. ✪✪✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20)*: Establish what's important to you and release yourself from unnecessary baggage. It's time to fine-tune your plans and speed up the process of getting what you want. Integrate what you want to achieve into your routine; you'll get the results and satisfaction you deserve. ✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20)*: Apply what you learn to your everyday routine. A positive domestic change will result if you research what's available and possible through institutional programs and courses. Refuse to be intimidated by authority figures. ✪✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22)*: Discovery is your ticket forward. Ask an expert, attend seminars or reunite with someone you trust to give you good advice. Don't be afraid to veer off in a new direction or try something foreign. Interesting connections will unfold. ✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22)*: Take responsibility for your actions, but don't promise what you cannot deliver. Pay attention to who you are, what you believe in and how you can improve your life, look and reputation. Reach out to someone you love, discuss your plans and be willing to compromise. ✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)*: Put your effort into something concrete, and bring about changes that will transcend the shifting markets and technology. Build your future on a platform that allows you to continue to learn and expand. ✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)*: Get out, participate and make your presence felt. Step up to the mic and follow through with determination. Be the one to make a difference instead of sitting on the sideline. If you love someone, let them know your intentions and feelings. ✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21)*: Let creative imagination take over, and you'll develop a unique way to adapt your living space to suit your lifestyle. Don't let what a friend, lover or colleague says taint your decisions. Change may be necessary, but it must be conducive to your needs. ✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)*: Listen, but question what's said. Rely on your resources to confirm information before you act. A joint venture will be trickier than anticipated. Consider investing more time and money in yourself. Don't let the past consume you. ✪✪✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)*: Take the initiative to improve. A workable space that helps you accomplish things will inspire you to achieve more. You don't have to spend to improve, but you do have to use your ingenuity to manufacture a routine. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)*: Listen, evaluate and choose to do what makes you happy. Following someone else will cost you emotionally and financially. Invest time and money in updating your look, adopting a healthy lifestyle and upgrading your qualifications. ✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20)*: Pay attention to where your money goes. Don't fall behind or neglect to update documents that can result in penalties. A proactive approach to health, financial and contractual matters will lead to peace of mind and more time to pursue your interests and long-term goals. ✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are progressive, meticulous and opportunity-driven. You are supportive and empathetic.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

				7	1	3	4	2
	3		2					9
							7	
2	6			1				5
	7			2			1	
	1	3				2		
3			1	5				
4	9				2	5		7
		7		8	9			

Difficulty: ★★★ 2/22

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

1	7	4	6	5	3	9	8	2
6	5	2	1	8	9	7	4	3
3	9	8	4	7	2	1	6	5
2	4	1	8	9	6	3	5	7
5	3	9	7	1	4	8	2	6
8	6	7	2	3	5	4	9	1
7	8	6	9	2	1	5	3	4
4	1	3	5	6	8	2	7	9
9	2	5	3	4	7	6	1	8

Difficulty: ★★★ 2/21

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WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

KENNELS Solution: 8 letters

V	E	R	E	T	L	E	H	S	E	R	V	I	C	E
P	E	R	I	N	S	T	A	L	L	E	V	A	R	T
C	O	T	U	N	T	T	C	E	T	O	R	P	T	B
I	E	R	E	T	B	E	N	A	D	O	O	R	I	E
T	N	C	T	R	I	O	K	R	R	O	Y	T	B	S
E	I	T	R	A	I	N	I	N	G	P	E	S	A	I
L	N	D	C	T	B	N	R	A	A	C	E	F	H	C
H	A	G	A	T	E	L	A	U	I	L	E	T	N	R
T	C	C	N	Y	D	R	E	R	F	T	B	S	E	E
A	O	D	V	R	C	A	B	O	Y	I	H	N	D	X
L	S	S	A	L	C	A	S	S	W	A	T	E	R	E
D	E	W	S	T	F	T	R	L	D	O	G	S	A	S
E	E	A	I	F	E	N	C	E	C	A	P	S	G	U
R	F	V	S	R	O	W	N	E	R	E	L	A	X	O
B	E	S	C	H	O	O	L	P	U	P	P	Y	G	H

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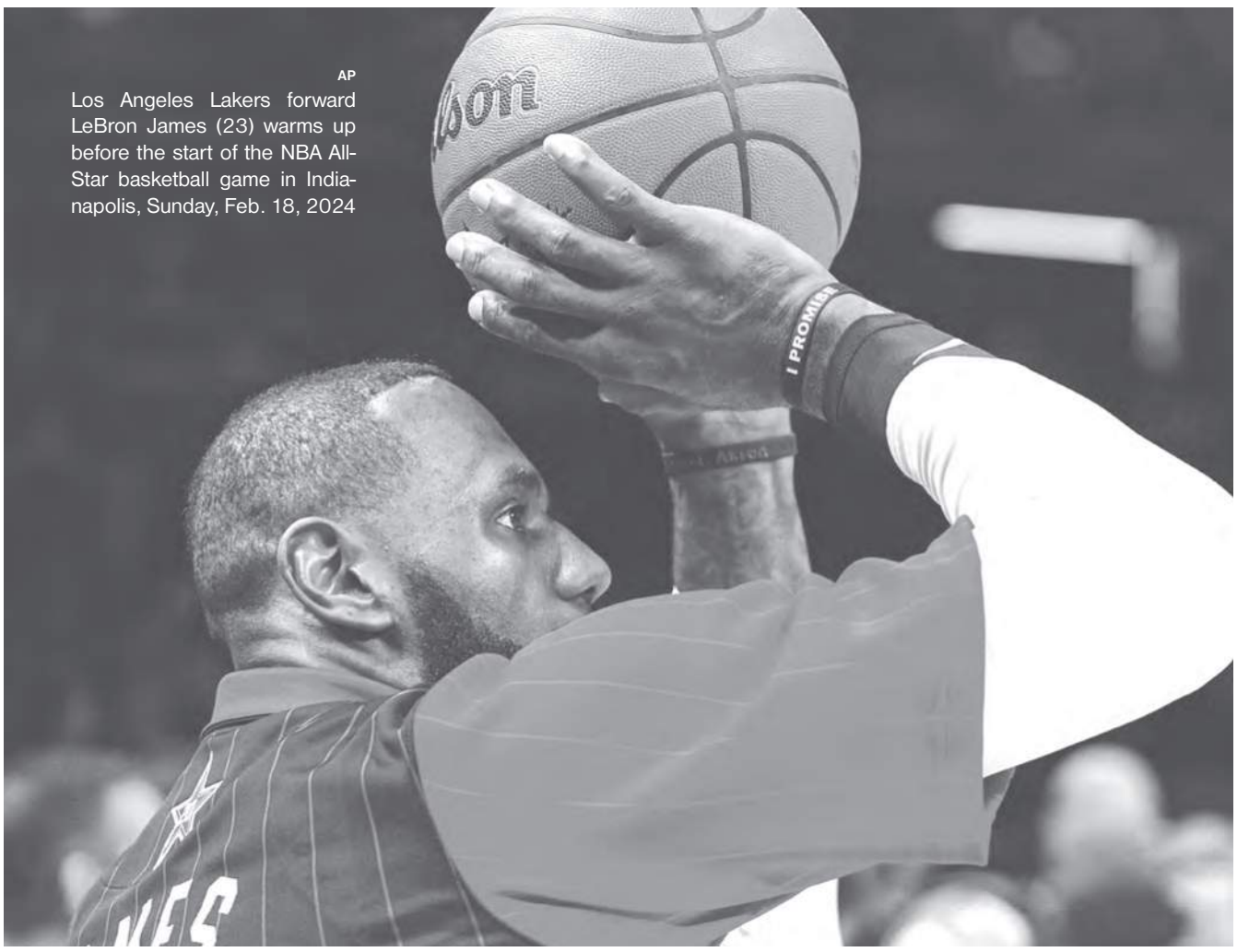
Active, Athletic, Bite, Blanket, Bred, Canine, Canvas, Carpet, Class, Day Care, Dogs, Door, Exercise, Fabric, Fees, Fence, Foster, Furniture, Garden, Gate, Habit, House, Install, Learn, Leash, License, Location, Owner, Portable, Protect, Puppy, Relax, Reward, Safety, School, Service, Shade, Shelter, Sleep, Space, Toys, Training, Travel, Veterinary, Water

Yesterday's Answer: Research

The NEW **Treasury 57** can be purchased online at www.WonderWordBooks.com, or call 1-800-642-6480. (In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367)

LeBron still committed to Paris Olympics, but health remains big key



AP
Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (23) warms up before the start of the NBA All-Star basketball game in Indianapolis, Sunday, Feb. 18, 2024

INDIANAPOLIS (AP)—LeBron James still wants to participate in the Paris Olympics this summer, sure sounds like extending his NBA career for at least a couple more seasons is an option and said he would like to see his playing days end as a member of the Los Angeles Lakers.

Of course, not even he knows if any or all of that is possible.

James played in his 20th All-Star Game on Sunday, extending his record for appearances in the NBA's midseason showcase, but arrived with a plan to not be on the court in Indianapolis for very long because of an ongoing treatment plan for his problematic left ankle. He had eight points in 14 minutes during the first half and didn't start the second half, giving up his spot to Golden State's Stephen Curry.

"The most important thing for me is definitely my health," James said.

And that will be the deciding factor in just about all of James' basketball decisions for the rest of his career—short-term, long-term, however long he has left on his unprecedented resume. The first priority right now is the playoffs, with the Lakers currently 30-26 and ninth in the Western Conference even after winning six of their last seven games.

"We're trending in the right direction," James said.

He is 39, having played more minutes than anyone in NBA history. If he comes back this fall for a 22nd season—and he intends to—he'll tie Vince Carter for the NBA record in that department. He insists that he doesn't know how long he wants to play, either.

For now, it's all about the Lakers and their postseason push. After that, he'll decide whether to play for USA Basketball this summer. At this point, Paris is in his plans.

"I told myself before the season, when I committed to being part of the Olympic team, obviously it was all predicated on my health," James said. "As it stands right now, I am healthy enough to be on the team and perform at a level that I know I can perform at."

The Olympic question is a bit tricky.

The Lakers' season could end in April, May or June. If it ends early, James will have tons of time to heal up and get ready for a U.S. training camp that starts in early July, then will have a number of exhibition games, followed by the Olympics that will end in mid-August. But if the Lakers make a deep postseason run, it might prompt James to say he'll value time off and getting ready for the 2024-25 NBA season over jamming another five or six weeks of basketball into his summer schedule.

"It's more miles put on these tires," said James, a three-time Olympian and two-time Olympic gold medalist. "But if I'm committed—which I am—to Team USA, then I'm going to commit my mind, body and soul to being out there for Team USA, being out there representing our country with the utmost respect and go out there and play."

He's 132 points away from reaching 40,000 for his regular-season career, which means he's likely somewhere around five games from hitting that milestone. There aren't a lot of records left to chase; James is already the scoring king and his place in history was secured long, long ago. He's long said he wants to play in an NBA that has one of his sons in it and USC freshman Bronny James would be eligible to enter the draft this spring.

"I have not mapped out how many seasons I have left," James said. "I know it's not that many."

He hasn't even figured out if he wants a retirement tour for a final season where he'll be saying goodbye in every NBA city or if choosing to "Tim Duncan it"—meaning going out very quietly, like the San Antonio star who never wanted any attention—will be the plan.

"I've never been that great with accepting praise," James said. "It's a weird feeling for me."

James could also be a free agent this summer if he chooses to go that route. He has a player option for more than $51 million for next season and most players wouldn't pass up making that kind of money. But James' net worth has been estimated to exceed $1 billion already, his off-court investments are varied, and it's probably a safe bet that the size of the paycheck no longer is a top priority.

"I am a Laker, and I am happy, very happy, being a Laker the last six years and I hope it stays that way," James said. "But I don't have the answer to how long it is, or which uniform I'll be in. Hopefully, it is with the Lakers. It's a great organization, with so many greats with it. I don't know how it's going to end, but it's coming. It's coming for sure."

Nets turn to Kevin Ollie as they seek to salvage their season,make playoffs

NEW YORK (AP)—Brooklyn Nets general manager Sean Marks hasn't given up on his team making the playoffs this season, and now Kevin Ollie will be tasked with leading it there.

Ollie was named Tuesday as Brooklyn's interim coach, replacing Jacque Vaughn, who was fired a day earlier.

The Nets are 11th in the Eastern Conference standings, 2 1/2 games behind Atlanta for the final play-in spot with 28 games remaining. Marks said the decision to replace Vaughn with Ollie during the All-Star break was based on "the direction of the team and where it's potentially trending."

Marks spoke with reporters for almost 20 minutes prior to the team's practice Tuesday night, its first under Ollie, who joined the Nets' staff as an assistant ahead of this season.

"He's always carried a great voice in there. He's very direct with the players. He does hold them accountable," Marks said. "I think what makes a good coach is to be able to put yourself in those players' shoes, be able to tell great stories and be brutally honest with guys and I think those are attributes that Kevin absolutely has."

The 51-year-old Ollie played 13 NBA seasons and led UConn to an NCAA title a decade ago. Ollie coached UConn from 2012-18. The Los Angeles native then spent two years (2021-23) as head of coaching and basketball development for Overtime Elite, a developmental league for young players, before joining the Nets.

"I played 15 years professionally, 13 years in this league," Ollie said. "Never once did (a) coach call a play for me. I had to get it with grit, I had to get it with determination, I had to get it with a mindset that we're gonna get better each and every day. That's how I coach, that's what I'm going to demand. I want them to demand that from me, and that's from day one. We can't be 30th in loose balls, we can't have five charges on the season. We can't have those things. That's losing basketball with me."

Vaughn went 71-68 in two stints with the Nets, including a brief stretch as interim coach at the end of the 2009-10 season, and led Brooklyn to the playoffs twice. He was seen as a stabilizing force after replacing Steve Nash seven games into last season.

This season, the Nets are 21-33 and have dropped five of six, including a 50-point loss to Boston in their last game before the All-Star break.

Marks was asked whether that ugly defeat factored into his decision.

"I think that's one thing," Marks said. "When you get to a juncture here and you've had the last two months, as I've said before, we have not had the results that we wanted to have. ... This was an opportunity to make a change at this particular juncture. There was no one (thing) you could look back on and say it was then or then or this. You look at it globally."

When asked whether owner Joe Tsai gave him a mandate to make the playoffs, Marks said no but added, "that is a goal, without a doubt."

Leading scorer Mikal Bridges said the Nets need to be unified to make up ground in the standings.

"You got to be ready," Bridges said. "Obviously, it's tough but you know, (the) main goal is to win. So we (have) to keep going, keep the main goal the main goal. ... It's gonna be tough and all that but the main thing is winning. Do whatever it takes, you know, to win."

Source: Mike Conley agrees to 2-year contract extension with Timberwolves

MINNEAPOLIS (AP)—The Minnesota Timberwolves and point guard Mike Conley agreed Monday to a two-year contract extension worth about $21 million that would last through his 19th season in the NBA, according to a person with knowledge of the deal.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the contract had not yet been finalized. The league is on a brief hiatus for the All-Star break.

The 36-year-old Conley is in his first full season with Minnesota, after arriving a little over a year ago in a trade with Utah just before the deadline. He's currently making a little more than $24 million this season on a deal that was set to expire this summer, and this move is another signal that the club is all-in on trying to chase a title with the current core, even if it comes with a hefty luxury tax hit.

The four-time winner of the NBA Sportsmanship Award has provided the Timberwolves an invaluable dose of leadership, maturity and unselfishness for coach Chris Finch and the staff, plus career-best 44.2% shooting from 3-point range. That rate ranks ninth in the league.

"Last year I was coming in here almost deer in the headlights. I was trying to figure it out. It was fast and fast movement and trying to really mesh with everybody's games as well. And now, I understand everybody on the team," Conley said. "I understand Finch and what he wants to accomplish."

His assist-to-turnover ratio (6.08) is the second-best in the NBA. His reunion with former Jazz teammate Rudy Gobert has also helped unlock the big man's fullest offensive potential after a rocky debut season.

Most of all, Conley has stayed healthy, playing in 50 of 57 games for the Western Conference-leading Wolves (39-16). He has sat out a few times for rest, but mostly chafed at the idea when broached by the coaching staff.

"I don't know how long I'm going to play, so every time I go out I've got to play as hard as I can, play as good as I can, give everything I've got, and hopefully it's enough to win," Conley said.

The Wolves return from the break Friday and host Milwaukee.

Premium talent is still available on MLB free-agent market

» But GMs don't seem in a hurry

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP)—Cleveland's new manager, Stephen Vogt, isn't sure why this year's free agent market has entered a deep freeze even as temperatures heat up during spring training in Arizona and Florida.

He just wants to see it thaw as quickly as possible.

"Those guys should be in camp," Vogt said. "I don't know who is at fault, I don't know why, I don't need to know. But our game's at its best when the best players are on the field.

"I hope those guys sign soon."

The guys Vogt is referring to are a half-dozen high-quality free agents who remain unsigned as the calendar nears March.

The resumes are impressive: two-time Cy Young Award-winning lefty Blake Snell, former MVP Cody Bellinger, six-time All-Star J.D. Martinez, four-time Gold Glove third baseman Matt Chapman, two-time All-Star shortstop Tim Anderson and left-hander Jordan Montgomery, who helped the Rangers to a World Series title last fall.

Vogt—of course—doesn't make front-office decisions. However, 15 of the 30 general managers who do were at Cactus League media day on Tuesday.

Nobody seemed particularly desperate to make moves.

"It ebbs and flows, but there have been years, like I remember I was in Cleveland, and we signed Nick Swisher and Michael Bourn late in camp," Cubs general manager Carter Hawkins said. "So it's not out of the ordinary."

This year's free-agent market peaked in December, when the Los Angeles Dodgers spent more than $1 billion to sign two-way superstar Shohei Ohtani and right-handed pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto. The defending National League champion Arizona Diamondbacks were also among the teams active early, signing lefty Eduardo Rodriguez to an $80 million, four-year deal.

AP

Chicago Cubs' Cody Bellinger watches his home run during the third inning of a baseball game against the New York Yankees, July 7, 2023, in New York.

D-backs general manager Mike Hazen said he didn't want to speculate on other teams' strategies.

"I can't answer for everybody else," Hazen said. "I feel like we've made a decent amount of transactions. We're looking to help build our team any way we can and we've ended up getting a couple of deals done."

The Los Angeles Angels and San Diego Padres are two teams that have spent big in the past, but seem to be taking a more cautious approach in 2024. The Boston Red Sox have been fairly quiet, too, and third baseman Rafael Devers said Tuesday his team could use some help.

"Everybody has a different perspective," Angels GM Perry Minasian said. "Every offseason is different. I don't think there's any offseason that's the same, because it's a different pool of players. For me, we're worried about what we have, not what we don't have."

The Padres had the third-highest payroll in baseball last season at $258 million, but finished 82-80 and missed the playoffs. The franchise has been in cost-cutting mode since.

San Diego still has a talented roster with a lineup that includes Fernando Tatis Jr., Manny Machado and Xander Bogaerts. General manager A.J. Preller seems content to see where that group leads the Padres this summer, even though the team hasn't ruled out adding players.

"That's a pretty good place to start," Preller said. "From our standpoint, it's a good foundation."

The 39-year-old Vogt is just two seasons removed from his 10-year playing career and has some personal experience with late signings. He signed with the Giants just as spring training began in 2019 and signed with the A's a week before the season started in 2022.

"It's weird," Vogt said. "You feel like you've got to hurry up and get there. You feel like you've missed the 8-ball. You believe you're going to get a job, but there's also that 'What if I never get the call?' It can weigh on you.

"There's a lot of good players out there who are probably thinking the same thing."

Playing for the Oakland A's hasn't been glamorous for years

MESA, Ariz. (AP)—Catcher Shea Langeliers made a little space to set down a cup of coffee in his locker, then gingerly turned around, careful not to disturb the belongings of teammates JJ Bleday and Max Schuemann that were all crammed into a corner of Oakland's spring training clubhouse.

Playing for the Athletics over the past few decades rarely has been glamorous—at least by MLB standards.

In 2024, it could also be downright weird.

The Athletics—set to move to Las Vegas sometime around 2028—are facing a lame-duck season at the Oakland Coliseum, which hosted some of the smallest crowds in recent MLB history in 2023. The A's have met with Oakland city officials about extending the club's lease beyond 2024, but nothing is certain at the moment.

"I think if you focus on that, it can affect you," Langeliers said. "The main goal is just to focus on baseball and what you can control. That can get away from you sometimes. I think every player in here will tell you their focus is on the field."

But the franchise's uncertain future was enough of a topic that manager Mark Kotsay—along with team president Dave Kaval—were on hand at Hohokam Stadium in Mesa for a 45-minute team meeting on Monday, which was also the team's first full-squad workout.

"We talk a lot about distractions and this group has been through it to a certain extent last year," Kotsay said. "We did address the uncertainty of the '25 season, but ultimately, these guys are here to play baseball and have a long career, whether that's in Oakland or Miami, for that matter, the game doesn't change.

"The circumstances are what they are."

Kotsay said he wants to make sure players know his office is open if there are questions, though to be honest, he doesn't have many answers at the moment. It's unclear whether the franchise will play its 2025 home games in Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco or a minor league stadium in Las Vegas.

The team reached an agreement with Bally's and Gaming & Leisure Properties to build a stadium on the Tropicana hotel site along the Las Vegas Strip, and the Nevada Legislature approved $380 million in public financing last June for a $1.5 billion stadium that the team wants completed for the 2028 season. MLB owners unanimously approved the move in November.

But the next few years could be rocky.

"We're very transparent," Kotsay said. "When we get information, we pass it along to the players. You get more information than I do, probably."

From a purely baseball perspective, the A's hope they're a franchise on the rise following a brutal 112-loss season. They've got a young nucleus of hitters that includes All-Star slugger Brent Rooker, speedster Esteury Ruiz and Langeliers, which improved over the final few months of the season after a rough start.

The A's also added a few veterans to the pitching staff, hoping that Ross Stripling and Alex Wood can help stabilize a rotation that includes JP Sears and Paul Blackburn.

Oakland has had one of the league's lowest payrolls over the past several seasons under much-maligned owner John Fisher, and this one will be no exception. But until the past few years, the A's have found a way to have at least moderate success, making the playoffs in six of nine seasons from 2012-2020.

Rooker is a bit of a late bloomer by baseball standards, coming off a 30-homer season that helped the 29-year-old become a first-time All-Star and the latest in a long line of sluggers for the A's. He has enjoyed his time launching dingers in front of Coliseum fans—regardless of whether it's in the hundreds or thousands.

The A's averaged 10,276 fans per game last year, easily the lowest number in MLB.

"The fans that come are as loyal of fans of anything as you will find anywhere," Rooker said. "They are incredible people. Just from a personal standpoint, you get to know a lot of them. There's a group in right field that I talk to and hang out with when I'm out there. They're really, really fun people."

But there's little doubt this is a difficult split. And the longer this long goodbye takes, the more awkward it could get.

MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred acknowledged last week that the situation wasn't ideal. The A's have been in Oakland since 1968, and their generations of fans aren't going quietly.

"The reality of the situation is that whenever you're leaving a market where you've been for decades and you're going to make a move to a different city where there's not a stadium, that's a really difficult undertaking, and it's not going to be seamless, smooth," Manfred said. "There's going to be bumps along the road."

Garden promoted by MLB to deputy commissioner of business and media

NEW YORK (AP)—Noah Garden has been promoted by Major League Baseball to deputy commissioner of business and media.

MLB said Tuesday the promotion was effective Jan. 1.

Garden becomes the second deputy commissioner alongside Dan Halem, who has been deputy commissioner for baseball administration and chief legal officer since December 2017.

The 52-year-old Garden joined MLB Advanced Media in January 2001 and became BAM's executive vice president of revenue. He was promoted to MLB's executive vice president of commerce in December 2017 and chief revenue officer in August 2020.

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Premier Builders establish strong start

Premier Builders debuted strong in the Legends Sports Association Invitational Basketball League Season 2 last Sunday at the TSL Sports Complex in Gualo Rai.

After the opening ceremony/parade of teams, draws were made, and the first game of the season went to Premier Builders and Yuman.

It was a level playing field with a lot of back-and-forth action, but Premier Builders got the better of them and won, 87-82.

Jerome Directo directed the Builders on the winning path with a 3-pointer to start off the game and continued to let it rain buckets throughout the first half. He was kept pace by teammate Jun Estolas as Yuman's Justine Enano and Sean Licayan were the duo that kept the game close.

The first few minutes of the first half saw a give-and-take of baskets and short 1-point leads—first at 9-8, then 11-10, and 19-18 in favor of Yuman—until Premier Builders started to pull away with less than 10 minutes left.

LEIGH GASES

Premier Builder's John Godoy is fouled as he makes a jumper during their game against Yuman in the debut of the Legends Sports Association Invitational Basketball League Season 2 last Sunday at the TSL Sports Complex in Gualo Rai.

Premier Builders went on to secure a close 47-43 first half lead—as the lead continued to seesaw between both teams.

Yuman's Jaysey Magno suddenly caught on fire at the start of the second half and shot three back-to-back-to-back 3-pointers that rivaled Premier Builder's Benedict Villocero's speed and fast-break plays—with the game still anyone's at this point.

It was still close on the scoreboard with the game clock winding down, but Directo and Estolas ensured their team secured their first win of the season as they bounded up and down the court and took turns at the basket.

In the end, Directo scored 25, with Estolas right behind at 23 points. Yuman's Enano put up 21, while Licayan shot 16 points.

After their game, Tax Pro/Triple L won over Kag Bros, 71-67; Choju won via an 84-65 blowout against Unity Trade; and Tan Holdings edged La Mesa Kusina, 75-66.

Last Tuesday, Best Deal slipped past Bourbon Bar & Cafe, 95-97; and Elite Force overwhelmed Napa Auto Parts, 103-88.

Along with the teams mentioned, the rest of the teams in the league include Live 2 Live, Savemore, Stag, and Long Shot.

The games are set for Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays at the TSL Sports Complex.

Premier Builders 87 – Directo 25, Estolas 23, Godoy 9, Yanto 9, Mejarito 9, Villocero 6, Dela Cruz 3, Castillo 2, Didulo 1.

Yuman 82 – Enano 21, Licayan 16, Aldan 15, Magno 12, Agustin 8, Nuyles 4, Leomo 2, Itibus 2, Cristobal 2.

Scoring by halves: 47-43, 87-82.

SERIN

From page 20

the rain, I had to play short sets in the second week but I still enjoyed it. It was a little challenging to play in windy conditions but I tried to work through it."

As to who was the toughest matchup, she said all were pretty tough. "Each player has their own unique style and so I have to play a little differently with each of them."

With the shorter game due to the weather and time constraints, she said she prefers a full game because the shorter sets tend to make her move nervous. "I feel like with full sets, if I am down the first couple of games, I still have time to come back but with short sets, there's not much time."

In the women's open 3.0 finals, No. 1 seed Jin Hua defeated Vivian Chung, 4-2, 5-4. Hua won all four of her matches in their division's round-robin format with five players.

The 2024 Coconut Classic began last Feb. 9 to Feb. 11, then from Feb. 16 to last Monday and was organized by the Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association.

Results of the boys/girls divisions will be posted in the next issues of *Saipan Tribune.*

CORRY

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motocross journey.

"I'd like to especially thank Matthew Guerrero and his family for lending me his bike to use during this race as my bike was down. It truly means a lot! And I'd also like to thank my team Ericco Racing, my coach Ellery Cruz, my family and friends, Edmund Villagomez and our sponsors Inas kitchen, Marianas Native, YCO True Value, Michelob Ultra, Pokka, Stress Free and TurnKey Solutions."

In the Novice Class, Christian Camacho edged Matthew Guerrero after also winning the second heat with both riders accumulating 47 points. Ponce Rasa finished third with 38 points.

Aric Cruz, meanwhile, won in Pangelinan's old stomping grounds by topping the Intermediate Class with a perfect score of 50 points. Guam's Richard Wenden was second with 44 points, while former MRA president Charles Cepeda was third with 38 points.

In the Veterans Class, Tim Wenden of Guam and Cuki Alvarez both finished tied with 47 points, but the former took the plum after prevailing in the second heat. Champi Villacanes took third with his 40 points.

Results of the other classes will be published in the next issue of *Saipan Tribune.*

NMSA

From page 20

160 clean & jerk, and an overall 280kg weight lifted.

Ramsey was the Male Athlete of the Month for March. He won the men's singles open in the Bridge Capital Tennis Classic held in March. It was Ramsey's third straight men's open singles titles for 2023. He also topped the NMI rankings in the men's open for the 2022-2023 season, having won the TanHoldings Tennis Classic, SIS Student Council Tennis Tournament, and the White Coconut Classic Tennis Tournament. He represented the NMI in the North Pacific Regional Championships in Guam and Pacific Oceania Junior Championships as a coach and also participated in the 2023 Pacific Games as a player and coach.

Buco was the Male Athlete of the Month for April. He ruled the 7th Saipan Unity Lions Club Bike Race held in April. He also triumphed in the 2023 Hell of the Marianas that took place in August.

Schmidt was the Male Athlete of the Month for May. He played for Martech-Ol'Aces in the 2023 Michelob Ultra Cup Men's Island-wide Basketball League. Douglas played a big role in their win during the championship game against Team Marianas on May 30, as he put up 22 points despite playing with a head injury. Schmidt was also a member of the Team Nesian Built, which ruled the NMIBF Marianas Arsenal 3x3 Basketball Series 2k23 for the second straight leg.

Cristobal was the Male Athlete of the Month for June. He won a pair of gold medals in the 67-kg weight class in the USA Weightlifting U25 National Championships held in Colorado in June. The Air Force Academy graduate competed in three regional/national championships since January and won a gold medal in the Miami Classic last January and another gold and the best lifter award in the Crestview Bar Slam 2023 last March. Cristobal represented the NMI in the 2023 Pacific Games and won a bronze medal in the clean & jerk.

Saralu was the Male Athlete of the Month for August. He played for the Cardinals that eventually ruled the 2023 Tan Holdings-Saipan Baseball League after going undefeated in the regular season and in the playoffs. He posted the highest batting average in the SBL in July with his .625 from 10 hits out of 16 at-bats.

Colisao was the Male Athlete of the Month for October. In only his second international competition, Joey Colisao earned the gold medal in the +109-kg weight category at the Oceania U23 Weightlifting Championships held at the Samoa High-Performance Center in Apia, Samoa last Oct. 7. He won with a snatch lift of 130 kg (286 lbs) and a clean and jerk of 160 kg (352 lbs) for a total of 290kg (638 lbs). Colisao also competed in the 2023 Pacific Games.

Santos was the Male Athlete of the Month for November. He won the first gold medal for Team NMI in the 2023 Pacific Games. He topped the snatch category in the men's 55-kg class in the weightlifting competition. His third lift of 96 kg gave him the gold in the snatch category and he later added a bronze (112 kg in clean & jerk) and silver (208 kg total weight lift) after completing his events. He went on to bag four medals in Honiara, as he was also awarded the silver medal in 2023 Oceania Championships, which was held simultaneously with the 2023 Pacific Games.

The Female Athlete of the Year are Tania Tan of athletics; Antonette Labausa of weightlifting; Janelle Pangilinan of badminton; Erin Frink of athletics; Pipit Ball of va'a; and Christina Tudela of bodybuilding.

Tan was named Female Athlete of the Month for February and November. She represented the CNMI at the World Athletics Cross Country Championship in Bathurst Australia in February, joining the 10K race and timing in at 44:41. Earlier in January, she reset the NMI record in the indoor 3K race after clocking in at 10:57.58 in the Ramapo Season Opener Indoor Track Meet in New York. Less than a week after the race in New York, she joined the 5K event in the River Hawk Invitational in Boston and reset the CNMI mark with her 18:03.22. Later in the 2023 Pacific Games, Tan became the first NMI female athlete to have won two gold medals in the regional event after ruling the 5K and 10K races in Honiara. She also set a new Pacific Games record in the 5K after submitting 18:08.69.

Labausa was named Female Athlete of the Month for March. She competed in the 81-kg weight class in the Marianas Weightlifting Cup and won the gold after setting a new personal best of 100 kg in the clean & jerk. Her best snatch was 75 kg for a total weight of 175 kg. Labausa also participated in the 2023 Pacific Games, nearly making it to the medal podium, as she finished fourth in her weight class.

Pangilinan was named the Female Athlete of the Month for April. She won two gold medals in the 50th Tan Holdings Badminton Tournament in April. She teamed up with Lina Tsukagoshi to win the women's doubles open, and then partnered with Leonard Manuel in the open mixed doubles to beat Guam's Rui Wang and Jenny Yui in the finals. Pangilinan also participated in three high-level competitions—the Yonex Oceania Championships in New Zealand and the Crowne Plaza Northern Marianas Open and TakeCare Saipan International that Saipan hosted and were part of a series of qualifying tournaments for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. She also represented the NMI in the Badminton World Federation Coach Mentorship Program in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Frink was named Female Athlete of the Month for June. She represented the NMI in the Oceania Cup and raced in two individual events and two relays. She set a personal best in the 200m (27.60 seconds) and 400m (1:10.45) and was part of both the 4x100m, 4x400m mixed relay teams that made CNMI records. Frink made this accomplishment despite being a newcomer in the athletics program.

Ball was the Female Athlete of the Month for October. In the Micronesian Cup in Guam in October, Ball represented Marianas Outrigger Club and won two gold medals and two silvers. She was the stroker on MOC women's team that topped the 500 meter and 1000-meter sprints finals. In the V1 500m race, she won a silver and added another one when she helped MOC to a second-place finish in the V6 long distance event. From May to October, Ball was a force for MOC, leading the group to overall first place finishes in the V6 long distance, V6 500m sprints, V6 1,000m sprints, and V12 500m sprints.

Tudela was a co-winner (with Tania Tan) of the Female Athlete of the Month award for November. She won a gold medal for the NMI in the 2023 Pacific Games after topping the women's model physique category. She got the judges' nod in the preliminaries in the morning session of the competition in Honiara and in the evening finale, beating five other competitors.

Team of the Year nominees are the Marianas High School girls outrigger canoe team; Saipan International School elementary track and field girls team; Marianas Outrigger Canoe women's team; CNMI National Swimming relay team; and the NMI U23 National Football Team.

LeBron still committed to Paris Olympics, but health remains big key.

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Sports

Premier Builders establish strong start

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Corry tops Expert Class as MRA season starts

TISHA FERRER
Corry Pangelinan in action in the Expert Class of last Sunday's 2024 "MOTO IV" Points Race Series at the Cowtown Race Park.

By MARK RABAGO
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EDITOR

Corry Pangelinan claimed his first Expert Class checkered flag by topping last Sunday's race in the 2024 "MOTO IV" Points Race Series at the Cowtown Race Park.

The 19-year-old former Intermediate Class champion topped the second heat after going second in the first.

He went on to beat defending series champion Shane Alvarez in the premiere division of the season opening February race of the Marianas Racing Association. Both riders finished with 47 points, while MRA president Ellery Cruz finished third with 40 points.

"It feels great. The win was basically handed down to me. I crashed on the second heat and luckily no injuries so I was able to get back on the bike and finish the race. I was pushing myself to catch up then everything went haywire after a few laps. Everyone's bike just had to have an issue on race day that I have been waiting for since the end of last season," said Pangelinan.

The issues he alluded to were Alvarez running out of gas and Cruz, who incidentally is Pangelinan's coach, having to deal with bike issues.

"It would have been awesome if everything went smoothly so we can finish the race together and in that way, I can have a vision on how I performed so it can help me improve for the races to come. I'm anxious because I am now riding with the fast guys not to mention my coach Ellery Cruz as well," added Pangelinan, who said the track was soaking wet that made it very difficult to navigate the course.

He went on to dedicate the win to everyone who supported him throughout his

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NMSA names Male/Female Athlete of the Year, Team of the Year nominees

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

The Northern Marianas Sports Association announced the 2023 Male/Female Athlete of the Year nominees, with the winners awarded last night in the 2023 NMSA Annual Awards Banquet at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan.

The Male Athlete of the Year nominees are Leo Apelo Jr. of weightlifting; Colin Ramsey of tennis; Joel Buco of cycling; Douglas Schmidt of basketball; Leowell Cristobal of weightlifting; Nokki Saralu of baseball; and Joey Colisao and Raymond Santos of weightlifting.

Apelo was named Male Athlete of the Month for February. He won gold in the 81-kg class in the 2023 Guam Weightlifting Federation Youth/Junior/Senior Championships held in February. He prevailed against competitors from Guam and Palau after his snatch lift of 105 kg, clean and jerk of 140 kg, for a total of 265 kg. Apelo also competed in the Marianas Cup 2023 held at the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium last March and earned first place with a 120kg snatch,

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Cristobal

Saralu

Colisao

Ramsey

Schmidt

Buco

Apelo

Santos

Ball

Frink

Tudela

Labausa

Pangilinan

Tan

Serin fends off sister for women's open title

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

The older Chung sister, Serin, bested the younger Irin in the women's open finals of the 2024 White-Coconut Classic at the American Memorial Park tennis courts last Monday.

No. 1 seeded Serin made it to the last match on a not so ideal and windy day, but still managed to snag the win, 4-1, 5-4. The tourney's Sunday games were rained out, so they had to cut each of the matches short with no deuces on Monday.

Their division was a round-robin format as there were only four players. Serin first went up against Hannah Chae earlier in the morning and lost a close 2-4, 4-2, 8-10 match-up. Before that, Serin cemented her first win in the division after taking down Savita Sikkel, 6-1, 6-0 last Saturday.

After the finals with her sister, the 17-year-old said her strategy "was to try and control the point to the best of my ability. It's always a little nerve racking and very exciting to play my sister in tournaments."

Serin said of the tourney, "I had a lot of fun in the tournament. Unfortunately, due to

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LEIGH GASES
Serin Chung goes for a serve during her women's open singles finals against her sister, Irin, in the 2024 White-Coconut Classic last Monday at the American Memorial Park tennis courts.